

SUGPIAQ RUSSIAN ORTHODOXY –
CONCEPTUAL ANALOGY IN RELIGIOUS SYNCRETISM
IN NANWALEK ALASKA

A
DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty
of the University of Alaska Fairbanks

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

By

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Fairbanks, Alaska

December 2009

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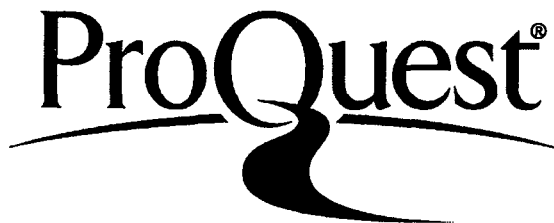
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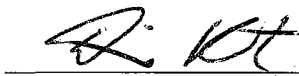
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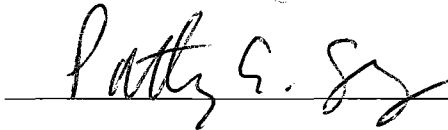
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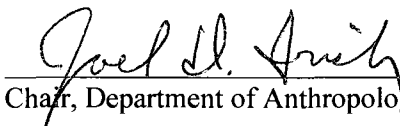






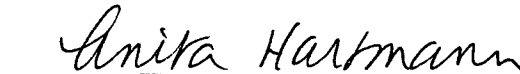


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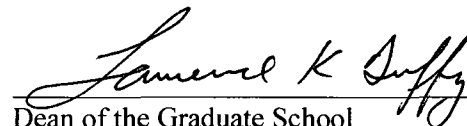


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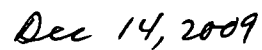
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Abstract

Religious conversion is often highly unstable, can be nominal in nature, and may not have lasting effects on converted people and their culture. For the Sugpiaq of Nanwalek, however, Russian Orthodoxy has become “native” (and Native) in the sense that it has been incorporated into everyday Sugpiaq reality, and referred to as such by all in the community. Therefore, examining the unique history and practice of Orthodoxy in Nanwalek provides insight into the process of integration of a foreign religious idea into a new cultural environment.

The focus of this dissertation is on contemporary Sugpiaq Russian Orthodoxy, as it is formulated in culture-specific analogies and conceptualized through the process of religious synthesis. In Sugpiaq Russian Orthodoxy, Russian traditions and Russian Orthodoxy are mediated through a Sugpiaq cultural logic to create and re-create a culturally specific religious identity. To better understand the process of internalization, this dissertation explores the interplay between Orthodox and traditional Sugpiaq understandings of power, hierarchy, social status, and authority. By doing so, it offers insight into how people interpret certain aspects of their religion according to their own ontological reality, in order to integrate foreign religious ideas into the local cultural context.

Based on Sugpiaq Russian Orthodoxy, I propose a new term, conceptual analogy, which can be used to explore people’s thought processes in assigning cultural significance to religious meaning, as well as through cultural dynamics that govern the selection and maintenance of religious affiliations. Although conceptual analogy is not restricted to one particular religious or cultural tradition the analogy that is conceptualized is always culture-specific. Therefore, conceptual analogies can be found in all situations where an ongoing conversation develops through syncretism, which is an inherent aspect of religion, as cultural internalization and re-conceptualization.

Conceptualizing Russian Orthodoxy through Sugpiaq understandings of reality and fully integrating it into their community made it possible for people in Nanwalek to maintain their Orthodox faith. Thus, Russian Orthodoxy is no longer a foreign religious concept in Nanwalek, but rather a significant component of Sugpiaq identity.

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If I unintentionally left anyone out, I sincerely apologize.

1. Introduction

“The [...] usual, or at least currently fashionable, practice is to devote at least a chapter of your book or Ph.D. thesis to a tortured, self-flagellating disquisition on the ethical and methodological difficulties of participant observation.” (Fox 2008: 4).

So here is mine...

At the beginning of my research I was interested to find an answer to one specific question: why are the Sugpiaq people living in the Alaskan village of Nanwalek still Russian Orthodox today?

It is a well known fact that Russian Orthodoxy is one of the most prevalent religions in Alaska, and a large number of the Orthodox people are Alaska Natives. This phenomenon is usually explained through various historical facts and the interpretations of the connections between Alaska Native cultures and the cultural history and spirituality of the Russian Orthodox Church. Yet, it is difficult to ignore the fact that the colony of Russian America ceased to exist in 1867, and while the legal transition from Russia to the United States was almost immediate, the cultural transition is best described as still “in progress”. With the Russian withdrawal from Alaska, Orthodoxy did not cease to exist; in fact in some cases it became more popular in some Native communities than it was during the colonial era (Kan 1983, 1999). In other Native communities, the Orthodox faith was preserved by local people without any outside help, who became to view Orthodoxy as their own religion, a part of their identity as an Alaska Native. For this reason, Orthodoxy is still prevalent in many Alaska Native communities; in most villages it survived as one of the denominations in the competing religious landscape, while in others, such as in Nanwalek, it is still the only one.

Many Native people living in Alaska today have Russian ancestry, belong to the Russian Orthodox Church, and follow traditions and customs that originated in a Russian cultural context. What sets the Sugpiaq people of Nanwalek apart is their religious exclusivity towards Russian Orthodoxy. It is the only religion present in the life of the community, and all Sugpiaq people living in Nanwalek today are members of the Russian Orthodox Church. For this reason, in this dissertation, I will focus on the connections

between people's Sugpiaq ethnic identity and their religious identity as Orthodox Christians, by describing the most defining aspects of contemporary Sugpiaq life in Nanwalek. Furthermore, I will explore the reasons behind people's conceptualization of Orthodoxy as part of their Sugpiaq culture, by using the theoretical framework of religious syncretism in order to delineate the thought processes that facilitate religious and cultural synthesis. Finally, I propose the notion of conceptual analogy to further the understanding of the processes involved in the internalization and re-interpretation of foreign religious ideas into local cultural environments.

1.1. "Do You Guys Have Enough Food?"

This dissertation is essentially based on fifteen months of fieldwork in the village of Nanwalek, Alaska, located on the southern tip of the Kenai Peninsula. Nanwalek, as many other villages in Alaska, is not connected to the road system, and can be reached from the outside only by boat or by air in most parts of the year; also, it is a Native community populated by Sugpiaq people. I feel very fortunate to have been able to gain access to the village and obtain permission from the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA) council for my extended stay, as most non-Native outsiders in the village are either affinal relations or teachers in the local school. As I belonged to neither category, my fieldwork was preceded by preliminary visits, which I was able to arrange with the help of local friends. The reason for selecting Nanwalek as my research site was influenced by personal reasons and by professional advice; both of which played important roles in developing this project.

My first inclination towards studying Alaskan Native Russian Orthodoxy became a reality when I was able to spend a nine-month-long fieldwork season in Valdez, Alaska, focusing on exploring this phenomenon. There, my mentor, Diane Selanoff, introduced me to Sugpiaq Alutiiq traditions and gave me the opportunity to gain my first glimpse of the intimate relationship between Sugpiaq people and their Orthodox religion. Also, I was advised to visit and spend time in the coastal villages in order to have a thorough understanding of the "real" Sugpiaq life, which was reinforced by my academic committee once enrolled in the Anthropology Program of the University of Alaska,

Fairbanks. While there are a number of Sugpiaq villages along the coast of Prince William Sound and the Lower Kenai Peninsula that are fully or partially Orthodox, I decided to chose Nanwalek as my field site for several reasons. First of all, Nanwalek is often considered a very traditional village even amongst Sugpiat Alutiit, and it has only one religion present in the community, Russian Orthodoxy.¹ My decision was also influenced by the fact that I became acquainted and developed a friendship with a family of the village to whom I am ever grateful for their help and support.

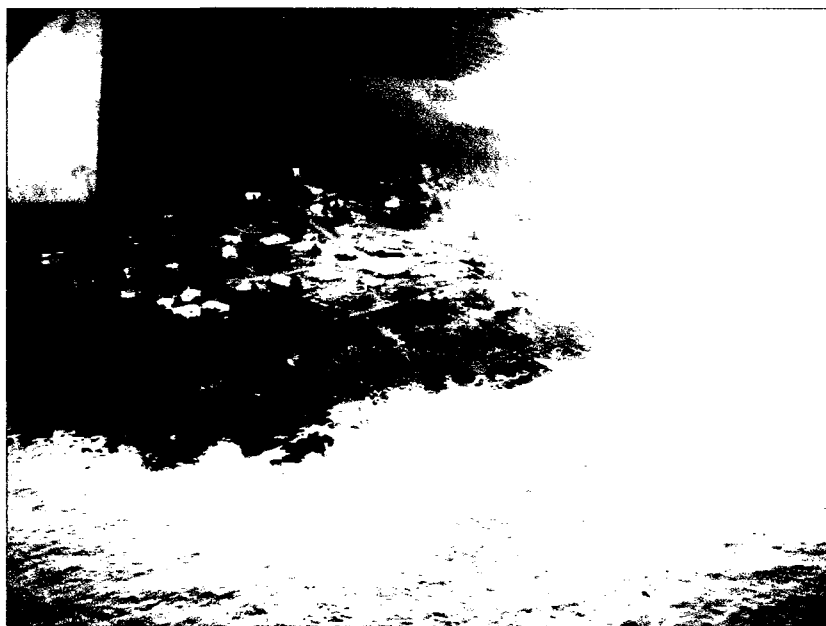


Figure 1. Nanwalek in 2006. Photograph by Medea Csoba DeHass.

As I was prepared and intended to conduct at least a one year long fieldwork, accompanied by my husband, it was necessary to make arrangements with the village in advance, which is in general quite an unprecedented concept in Native communities. Nanwalek's population at the time was considered quite young and rapidly growing, as the community was in the fortunate position of welcoming 6-10 newborns in every year.

¹ Nanwalek is probably the only Sugpiaq community in Alaska whose youngest Native speakers are in their 40's, and where the traditional winter festivities are carried out with a unanimous community participation in every single year.

Currently (in 2009) there are just under 300 people living in the village, and approximately 50% of the population is eighteen years of age or younger; therefore, the community is struggling to keep up with the population growth, and there is a serious housing shortage in the settlement. As a result, the IRA council conceded to furnish us with a house that was in desperate need of repairs, so that after our research was finished someone from the community could move in.

Rebuilding the house, a prominent landmark for many in the village, with a long and often fondly remembered history, became immensely useful, although often times frustrating, in our project. Continuously battling for building materials ordered from the outside, delayed deliveries, and later on rummaging through the village for a pipe connection, tool, or advice became our second nature, and a part of the “normal” village landscape. People saw us hammering away into the night, crawling under the house to put up insulation on top of crispy snow, fighting daily with frozen hoses and water taps, and unloading the most curious cargo of complete bathtubs, doors, and lumber from the Cessna airplanes flying in from the town of Homer. Being willing to make a home, and staying through winter, with far fewer amenities than most locals had access to, was interpreted positively by most people, which resulted in not only help, but gaining acquaintances as well. Witnessing such interest and approval of our building project brought my attention to the question: why did people consider our endeavor out of the ordinary? Later on, this early realization became a major vehicle for understanding insider-outsider and Orthodox-non-Orthodox dynamics, and the ways in which these categories are perceived, constructed and “manipulated” (Flinn 1992: 7) in the community.

By actively living in the village, sharing the ups and downs of everyday life ranging from volcanic eruptions through the lack of supplies to sudden wolf infestation, and struggling with the often-frustrating problems also experienced by others in the community, brought us close to many of the families. After the initial period of distant observation, people were always available to help, and to our delight, we soon started to experience an endless stream of visitors who often asked us the exact same question: “Do you guys have enough food?”

The first time it occurred I was quite surprised and interpreted the question on face value, which, of course, is only the very tip of the inherent meaning. With further

experiences I learned that, in fact, it also implies an invitation to another person's house, having the approximate meaning of "if you do not have food, you are welcome to come to my house and eat". In this sense it expresses a genuine concern for one and one's family, extending a boundary, and clearly marking one's household to be within the person's social network issuing the invitation. The question itself is an equivalent of an indication of the person's willingness to extend the acquaintance to a further level.

The nature of my fieldwork was also profoundly shaped by the fact that I had arrived with my husband, who was also working on his own research, and without whom I would have had an entirely different experience. In this context, we were acknowledged as a family unit, with our own place to live, or as one of the council members put it during our preliminary visit, "to have your own place where the Star can come during Christmas²". In this sense, we were also available to make connections, acquaintances, and friendships with anyone in the village. If I had arrived by myself, I would have been more reliant on other people, especially older women, and would have had a lot less insight into the male domain of the culture. As gender relations and tasks are quite distinct and articulate in the community, I virtually would have had no chance to conduct any conversation with men. Being a married woman gave me opportunities to understand both the female and the male spheres of the community, although I still had to adhere to the female side and follow the rules governing women's behavior. Needless to say, being married did not stop me from committing quite a few gender related faux-pas, which I had to learn from my own mistakes. On several occasions I engaged in male dominated activities, such as chopping wood, which was later (teasingly or not) commented on, expressing a level of disapproval. On other occasions it became clear that in a communal setting one is expected to join the female conversation instead of staying around the men, even if one's husband was part of that group. Not to mention that a certain part of the population was inaccessible for information, as they were unattached men not in my immediate social network, ergo, I had no business to talk to them at all beyond greetings and short pleasantries.

I soon became aware that after overcoming people's first, and natural, reserve towards outsiders, most everyone was quite tolerant in nature and ready to accept

² For further details on Christmas celebration and Starring please see chapter three.

personal eccentricities, if it was not religiously based. One of the main unwritten laws of the community is the zero tolerance toward any kind of religion that enters with the prospect of missionization. Therefore, if it is not religiously based, people were quick to forget previous mistakes, if one was willing to learn from them and correct them in future interactions.

We were a discrete household, albeit a strange one. We had no children at the time, and we had little or no resemblance to other outsider, non-Native families. First of all, we were not part of the school, and were not teachers. Secondly, I started attending and actively participating in Church services from the very first day of my arrival; and lastly, we were quite happy to do exactly the same things that other people in the village were doing: hauling and chopping firewood, fishing, collecting subsistence food, visiting, taking banya (steam bath), and going to Church. Therefore, by the time we finished most of the construction work in December, we became inseparably associated with the house itself and its location in the physical landscape of the village (and from then on we were “the cliff people” for having a house sitting right at the edge of the cliff overlooking the ocean). After acquiring a dog and a boat in addition to “our” house and a Honda ATV³, we truly felt that we had arrived in Nanwalek society.

Several months into the fieldwork, we were perceived to belong to the local social landscape, although our standing in the community was still ambiguous, as we obviously had no local blood relations.⁴ With the passing of time, however, our position was strongly influenced by the relationships and friendships we came to cultivate with local families and individuals. Naturally, it is impossible to achieve ultimate popularity among any given group of people, yet interactions, or rather the lack of them, were especially constructive in understanding local ways of conflict avoidance, friendships and social networks, social control, and learning about life in a close-knit community. Navigating through the labyrinth of unfamiliar etiquette and coping with the everyday social challenges of life is a natural part of fieldwork, although not an easy one (Barley 2000, Briggs 1970, Evans-Pritchard 1977, Gallatin Anderson 1990, McCarthy Brown 2001, Needham 1963). One is in a constant state of feverish hopefulness for any sign of

³ All Terrain Vehicles (ATVs) are called hondas in Nanwalek, as almost all of them are indeed made by Honda.

⁴ On questions of kinship and local ideas of ethnic identity please see chapter three.

acceptance from the host community. It would be hard to deny that it was reassuring, and on a personal level quite touching, to hear people call out “Welcome Home” one day after our return from a short shopping trip from the nearby town, instead of the “Welcome Back” greeting, which was reserved for visitors.

Although living in the community and regarding it as my “home” was tremendously influential both during and after my fieldwork, it was not the only factor that shaped my ethnographic research. While in Nanwalek, I fervently experimented with an assortment of fieldwork techniques (with various degrees of success), and anxiously tried to find my place in order to be able to start “the research”. Fortunately, I almost immediately became too busy with “being present” and trying to follow all that was happening around me, so for a while I forgot to worry about how I was going to translate all these happenstances into the elusive category called “fieldwork evidence”. Consequently, this is the time and the place where I have to reflect on the methodologies I used in my research, and the way they have influenced my understandings.

1.2. The Fieldwork Evidence

In designing this research I relied on various sources and was influenced by different factors that ultimately shaped the outcome of the fieldwork. First of all, I was looking to answer questions on the relationship between ethnic identity and religious syncretism; secondly, I purposefully designed the research to be able to collect concrete ethnographic information on the Lower-Kenai Sugpiaq area, which has been scarce, constricted, and incomprehensive in the past decades. This hiatus of ethnographic information did not simply become the object of academic zeal in this study, but rather a response to serious concern expressed by some of the local residents, who wanted Nanwalek to be written about and their way of life documented.

Obviously, not everybody in Nanwalek had these goals, and before I go any further I would like remark on the practice of generalization in ethnographic work. Generalized cultural representation has been one of the signal trademarks of anthropological work in the first hundred years of the discipline (Clifford 1983: 120-121). Today however, it is regarded as a poor stylistic, and even poorer methodological approach. Despite these opinions, I will still resort to generalizations in this dissertation

when discussing a specific phenomenon: namely, something that people all know they should believe whether or not they do so. This approach is different from the outdated declarations, which in my case would sound very similar to “the Sugpiaq believe X”. Yet, I will be discussing issues, where I will be establishing a theoretical “base line,” and conveying a message that is normally clear and shared by people living in Nanwalek. In this sense, what is shared is the knowledge that they should be all supporting a statement, even though they very well know that not everybody (or even maybe nobody) is actually doing things the way they are supposed to be done (Bourdieu 1980: 52-53). It does not change the fact, the “official agenda,” on how things are needed to be done, thought, or believed. As an example, many people living in Nanwalek comment on having had encounters with Big Foot in the past. The objective of this statement is not to imply that everybody in Nanwalek has personally seen or even believes in the existence of Big Foot, but to establish a baseline of information that there are stories, ongoing sightings, and encounters with Big Foot, who seem(s) to have been living in the vicinity of Nanwalek ever since people can remember. Big Foot is a part of people’s lives in Nanwalek, of Sugpiaq culture, has appropriated meanings, and can even be used as symbols to communicate specific messages, all of which would be clear to people living in Nanwalek, but probably not for anybody from the outside. This kind of generalization is unavoidable in writing ethnography, and should not be regarded as a breach of “ethnographic authority” by the researcher. It does not create and assign random meaning to participants, but rather it re-iterates the “official standpoint” of the people, to which one can individually relate.

Consequently, partially based on my previous dialog with people living in the village, I admit to arriving to Nanwalek with the intention of collecting ethnographic information and writing the first ethnography on this area. Although there are ethnographic studies available on other Sugpiaq Alutiiq areas of Alaska, Nanwalek has been quite inaccessible in the past. Partly, this was due to its ability to control the elements of its population (Csoba DeHass 2007: 209), and partly due to the fact that the majority of efforts in Alutiiq research have been focused on Kodiak Island and areas that share the Kodiak dialect of Sugtestun. There are excellent archival sources and academic studies available on these Sugpiaq Alutiiq areas, and in general on the Russian history of

Alaska, yet, it is difficult to find information pertaining specifically to Nanwalek and to its residents.

For all these reasons, in my analysis I heavily rely on my fieldwork data that, for the most part, was collected during my initial stay. Essentially, my fieldwork can be described as fifteen months of 24/7 participant observation, with the occasional panic attacks caused by cultural shock or the fear of losing perspective.

I also conducted interview sessions on specific topics (such as Christmas celebration, the New Year play, village life, Church practices, etc.) with some of the residents, and had many more discussions that were quite informal. My experience with formal interviews and recordings are very similar to Cruikshank's comment that "attempts to combine technology with optimal conditions for using that technology present some problems for producing recordings that are simultaneously high-quality and spontaneous" (1990: 15). For the most part, if technology did not kill the spontaneity of the interviewee, producing and asking for signatures on the Institutional Review Board (IRB) consent form sure did.⁵ People have had bad experiences with signing documents in the past, and quite understandably, it is an association that cannot just simply be changed or disregarded from one moment to another.

To accomplish some kind of equilibrium between the means and the ends of the research I focused my energies on the advantages of a long-term, in-residence fieldwork: having every-day, casual conversations and informal discussions. I complemented these techniques with visual recordings that were much less intrusive and better received, probably due to the fact that quite a few people living in Nanwalek are avid amateur and professional photographers. The subject of my DVD recordings were mainly Church related activities and services; while the photographs were the eclectic snapshots of all the goings-on of life in the village. Before my departure I made copies of these recordings and a selection of the photos, which I left in the village available for anyone to use and enjoy.

The problems and ethical implications of separating private and public spheres in the research environment are probably not unfamiliar to most fieldworkers. These

⁵I am not an opponent of IRB protocols, in fact, I truly support their goal of creating and maintaining a professional research standard, especially in Native communities. At the same time, it is undeniable, that the protocol is not specifically designed and oftentimes ill-fitting for social science research, and some aspects of it should be seriously reconsidered.

feelings in my case were intensified by the novelty of living in a very small community, and it quickly became necessary to set up mental boundaries that separated the information I came to know in public settings, as a researcher, and what people told me strictly in private, as to a friend. This dissertation does not contain private information, although it certainly influenced my outlook and understanding of life in the village.

These influences become especially prominent during one of my over two months long follow-up trips when I actually was working on a part of this dissertation. Similarly to Elwin (1964: 188), I have found this, writing while “in the field,” experience very rewarding in terms of immediate possibility to interact with my surrounding and make corrections. My collaborators were never further away than a ten minute walk, Honda ride, and often times as close as flying down the stairs to my hosts’ kitchen. Naturally, it also somewhat blurred the “context of discovery” with the “context of presentation” (Plath 1990), which was definitely a challenge, but not necessarily a negative experience. Continued interactions and input helped to further and justify the reality of my original “discovery,” to modify its significance, or to completely discard it, based on my ongoing experiences.

At this point, I believe it is crucial to clarify the usage of various terms in this dissertation particularly since they all have been scrutinized, negated, re-defined or at least questioned in the past couple decades during the discipline’s soul-searching quest in reorienting the ends and means of ethnographic fieldwork.

First of all, the very basis of anthropological work, ethnography, has been the focus of much polemic discourse (Abu-Lughod 1991, Brown and Dobrin 2004, Clifford 1986, Horner 2004, Narayan 1993, Pratt 1986, Rosaldo 1986, Sanjek 1990 etc.), exploring not only the methodologies used, but also the actors involved. Questions of who, where, how, on what basis, and with whom can anthropologist engage in ethnographic work were raised, and the outcome simultaneously changed ethnographic practice, and at the same time, and quite predictably, failed to provide ultimate solutions. The main reason for failure comes from the lack of acknowledgement of the individual, even intimate, relationship(s) anthropologists develop with their collaborators during the course of their work. I believe Wax’s observation on the success of Boas’s students in their fieldwork has a definite timeless message, as she sates: “the extent to which [anthropologists] really got to know and understand the people with whom they worked

depended partly on their interest and partly on their personal inclinations” (1971: 34). While there is much discussion on the ethics, multivocality, experimental narrative, authority, politics, and in general the “partiality of truth” in ethnographic work, the personal relationship between the parties involved, and the fact that individual relationships are crucial in fieldwork has even escaped the dialogue on reflexivity. As these relationships are largely defined by individual characteristics of the researcher and as such, impossible to completely influence through theoretical “codifications,” evoking ethical guidelines as the ultimate solution for the problems embedded in the nature of ethnographic research is not particularly constructive or useful (Tuhiwai Smith 2002: 68).

That being said, some of the ideas that surfaced from this ongoing debate have had an important influence on this dissertation. I fully agree with Brown and Dobrin (2004: 2) in calling attention to the importance of stepping away from the previous practice of excluding participants from the research, instead including them “as potential collaborators, not as exotic Others to be objectified by definite scientific signs” (Brown and Dobrin 2004: 2). Yet, I would also like to point out, that I regard the much-questioned relationship between the Self and the (cultural) Other very constructive, as it provides perspective in the ethnographic process. Naturally, the goal is not to construct the Other, and definitely not to objectify the collaborators, as the focus of study, rather to be able to perceive oneself as the Other, as one defines oneself vis-à-vis what one is not. In this sense “Othering” need not be a negative aspect of ethnographic fieldwork, rather a useful tool in creating perspective and recognizing the researcher’s assets and limitations in that particular research situation regardless of one’s position as indigenous, native, insider, outsider, halfie or wholie (Abu-Lughod 1991: 137).

I would like to emphasize that not being able to regard oneself as the “other” at a given point in the fieldwork actually can lead to the very undesirable and much condemned state of losing perspective. All anthropologists, by their training, should have the ability to cross over boundaries, immerse themselves in their area of study, and remove themselves from it again, in order to create a representation or interpretation for academic and local use. It is not only the halfie and feminist anthropologist who is “forced to confront squarely the politics and ethics of their representation” (Abu Lughod 1991: 142), but all of those embarking on the life-changing experience of fieldwork.

Consequently, this very aspect of methodological training should be brought to the forefront of writing, and for that matter also when reading, ethnographies.

Furthermore, while I agree that the ultimate goal of doing ethnographic work is not the “acquisition of knowledge about the Other” (Brown and Dobrin 2004: 6), nevertheless, I suspect most of us take up the anthropologist’s path precisely due to the fact that we are interested in what other people do. This of course does not, and should not, give anthropologists any kind of authority to exploit research situations, participants, and collaborators (Lassiter 2005: 12-13), rather it should be directed towards “the formation of a dialogic relationship” (Brown and Dobrin 2004:6), perhaps even with the purpose of finding something that works, is successful, fulfilling and genuinely enjoyed by all parties involved. It is true that in most cases where “critical ethnography” is practiced, with the acknowledgment of the researcher’s partiality, and with the practice of collaboration with the research participants (Horner 2004: 31), problems and concerns of the ethnographic participants surface. Consequently it is the responsibility of the researcher to address these issues and provide assistance (and not to initiate unsolicited actions) when prompted by those directly involved in these issues. However, doing ethnographic work should not be only concerned with finding the “problem” and the “negative”; after all, many communities are quite despondent and disillusioned by being made out to be “one with problem(s)” (Personal Communication with Lydia Black 2001). For a change, it would be refreshing to look at ethnographic work that focuses on peoples’ and communities’ successes and provide an example of a critical ethnographic work on something that actually “works”.

It is also important to address the newly created designation “indigenous,” and its correlations to previously, or simultaneously, used “native”, which actually raises further problems in the context of Alaskan anthropology. While native ethnography has been defined as “an ethnography – an intentional communication about a culture – undertaken by an ethnographer who is a native of the culture being written about and who is writing this account in an international language or in his or her own native language” (Werner and Schoepfle 1987: 124), in my case the division between native and non-native is not that definite. My initial interest with Orthodoxy in Alaska stems from my own personal circumstances, namely being born and raised in an Eastern Christian background, which allowed me to relate to the people of Nanwalek, who are of the Russian Orthodox faith.

While this fact put me in the delicate position of being both an insider, a “native” (based on religious background) and an outsider a “non-native” (as a non-Native European), I have found this predicament quite useful. I was able to cross boundaries and gain insight, in addition to understanding and interpreting the collected information. Because Russian Orthodoxy is an integral and all-encompassing part of life in Nanwalek, the “insider” knowledge of Eastern Christianity engendered the recognition of the interconnectedness between religious ideas and secular concepts, which are often viewed as not explicitly religious (such as Orthodoxy represented as an implicit element of Sugpiaq ethnic identity from a local point of view).

In Alaska, people refer to themselves as Native, with the specific meaning of having an Alaska Native background of Sugpiaq, Alutiiq, Aleut, Yup’ik, Inupiat, Tlingit, Eyak, or Dene’ origin.⁶ Occasionally, other kinds of “Nativness” are acknowledged as well, namely anyone who is usually referred to as “indigenous” from other parts of the world, simply become “Native” in Alaska. The concept of “Nativness” from this particular point of view conveys a distinct understanding, especially when combined with the fact that the concept of “halfies” is completely missing in the Alaska Native context. In most cases, one is either Native in Alaska, or not; and having some non-Native ancestry does not disqualify a person’s claim for assuming and genuinely acquiring a Native identity. This is definitely the case in Nanwalek, where there are no halfie-Sugpiat. Everyone born in Nanwalek with at least one local parent automatically becomes and grows up as Sugpiaq. In reality, however, the closest to a “halfie” is a person who is not born as Native, yet does not behave and act like a *Kassaq* (white person) either. During my Master thesis research in Valdez, my Yup’ik roommate informed me one day that I was definitely not a *Kassaq*, but a Native. I was somewhat taken aback by this strange turn of events and because of my curiosity I could not stop myself from asking her what kind of Native did she think I was, to which she triumphantly replied: “a Hungarian Native”. There was no arguing with that.

⁶ On this note, I would like to make it clear, that the widely used politically correct term “Inuit” instead of the previously used “Eskimo” does not hold any specific meaning in Alaska. Here, we have Yupit, Inupiat, and Sugpiat (or Alutiit) people who all belong to the Eskimo language family, and sometimes grudgingly or not, are referred to as such. Trying to call them Inuit would not only be an assault on their identity, but also completely incorrect (Kaplan 1999).

Therefore it is important to state that in this context, and contradicting Abu Lughod's definition (1991), it is possible to become a "halfie" through life experience, yet not born as one. This point became even more apparent, along with the uselessness of the Western/non-Western dichotomy, during my work in Nanwalek. I had arrived in Nanwalek as a technical non-halfie (born to two Hungarian parents, which is a questionable term on its own), a non-Westerner, but sufficiently European (from the East-Central part of the continent), who was going to do research in a thoroughly Western-country (the United States) with Native (or indigenous) people, who called themselves Sugpiaq. Positioning myself in this fashion eerily reminds me of Ian Ferguson's, the Canadian playwright and comedian's, first starting lines in "Me Funny," a collection of essays on Native humor: "These two Native North American Aboriginal First Nations Indigenous Peoples walk into a bar..." (Ferguson 2006: 123). Nevertheless, highlighting the ambiguity of these categories is crucial to understanding the ingenuity with which people navigate the unexpected categories of every day reality in Nanwalek. They had no problem in accepting me for what I was: an occasional native (note the spelling) when it came to questions of religion, church and various customs regarded as thoroughly "Sugpiaq," nonetheless with Russian origin. As an example, when I had first heard about the Sack-man in Nanwalek, who frightens children into behaving during Christmas time, I was not really surprised, as naughty children in Hungary are quite often promised to be taken by the *zsákos ember* (literally, the man with a sack). On the other hand, my husband was quite befuddled. A couple days later it would be my turn to be surprised, when faced with a discussion on various old-time candies or old TV shows, movie lines, foods, or sayings. All of these were borrowed from and referring to American popular culture in which one essentially grew up when raised in the United States. These examples were all perfectly clear to my Sugpiaq friends and my American husband, yet had to be carefully explained to my Hungarian self.

In the end, of course, neither my husband nor I were Native (in the sense of being indigenous), yet we were not quite that foreign either. Indigeneity in itself is an ambiguous concept. I tend to agree with Kuper in defining indigeneity⁷, which he believes to be

⁷ Yet again, creating additional levels of differences between being Indigenous and being Native. The former being rigidly defined on the basis of Euro-American assumptions of ties of blood and

heavily influenced by the assumptions of ties of blood and soil (Kuper 2003: 395) that is created on Euro-American ideology of culture, with one exception. I do not regard the emergence of indigenism and indigenous identity, which can be regarded as an “imagined community” (Anderson 1983), as a result of an aggressive world-encompassing conspiracy (even if it is often abused by various entities for their own purposes (Kuper 2003: 390, 393, 395)), but as a new strategy used by people to secure their own voice in decisions made about them. For this reason, I find it extremely imaginative, and equally impressive in terms of adaptation. Saugestad (2004: 264) touched upon these issues in her discussion “On the Return of the Native,” yet instead of highlighting how Indigenous people made use of the system that previously inflicted much misery and misfortune on them by actively seeking out and making use of an “official,” bureaucratically constructed, international forum, the author decided to focus on the less clear, definitely more patronizing, “defensive strategy” aspect of this movement. In the same discussion Kenrick and Lewis got the closest to pointing out Kuper’s main oversight on this issue, drawing attention to the strategy that uses the “language understood by those wielding power” (2004: 263). It is hard to argue with Niezen’s observation that “... what really sets [the indigenous] cultural movement apart is its absence of centralized dogma” (2003: 13), because it is precisely true.⁸ Indigenism is a movement that grew out of various historical factors, and for this reason it cannot be completely equated with the term

soil, and the latter having much more flexibility in its definition by Native communities including descent criteria as much as learned behavior, and “cultural substance.”

⁸ Dogma, by definition, means an articulation of opinions and beliefs from an authoritative point of view, which is adopted by all participants without questioning any part of the dogma. In this sense, indigenous dogma would have to have concrete, uncontested, all-encompassing, and authorized, by all peoples regarding themselves as indigenous, meaning – but in fact, no such thing exists. True, there are common characteristics associated with indigenous peoples, but these are a collection of different historical, cultural, and social realities and actualities that do not pertain to all individuals or communities who consider themselves indigenous. These similarities are not shared on an equally distributed, but on a collective basis; not everybody shares exactly the same characteristics, but everybody in the collective shares some characteristics with someone, who also considers themselves, and is considered by others, as indigenous. The United Nations Declaration of Rights of Indigenous Peoples specifically states in Article 3 that “Indigenous peoples have the right to self-determination,” which in part, includes that they can define themselves as indigenous (Cornet 2003). Of course, it is a circular argument, because first they need to be considered indigenous to be able to determine themselves as such. The Declaration does not explain who is, or can be, considered indigenous, due to the fact that there is no indigenous dogma, which could be accepted by all indigenous peoples. To subscribe to an indigenous dogma, an authoritative and all-encompassing declaration of opinions and beliefs, would automatically negate Article 3, and concurrently deprive indigenous people of their right to self-determination.

Native. Being Native in Alaska is something that one is born into and raised with, while being indigenous is a new, much later acquired identity, which is used and assumed in order to serve concrete purposes. Naturally, this might and quite possibly will change in the future with the expanding ideology of indigenism and the opportunities it provides for Alaska Natives. Some of these opportunities and their specific effects in the Native village of Nanwalek are further discussed in chapter five.

Deriving from the ambiguity of the terms scrutinized above, I decided to approach my fieldwork and the following ethnography using the outsider/insider schema, which leaves room for constant re-evaluation of one's own self in specific situations, and does not require a committed subscription to a rigid dichotomy (Narayan 1993: 671). Finding and effectively communicating the researcher's constantly changing place seems to remain the unsolvable Gordian knot of anthropological work, because "anthropological representation bears as much on the representer's world as on who or what is represented" (Said 1989: 224).

In my fieldwork I looked at Russian Orthodoxy in a specific setting, and while I arrived to my host community with insider knowledge about Eastern Christianity, I had much to learn. Simultaneously, I also had to constantly "reframe" (Narayan 1993: 678) what I have learned and what I had already known. Consciously acknowledging my own preconceptions and consequently compensating for them through "reframing" allowed me to create my own position as the Other in certain instances (Clifford 1986: 10). While in essence, it was very different from conducting research as a definite outsider, in general, it was quite similar. After all, researchers studying Eastern Christianity with a different religious, or atheistic, background have to deal with their own preconceptions at one point or another as well.

For this reason, I believe that the actual idiosyncratic experience and the process of fieldwork is very different for everyone in the field, as all researchers approach their projects with personal "baggage" (Pullar 1992) that contains a variety of preconceptions. Regardless of their personal background however, they should be able to turn this baggage into their advantage and compensate for them through various fieldwork methodologies. Bias, stemming from such preconceptions, can be avoided by the thorough analysis and recognition of one's own predispositions, and consequently corrected by establishing the balance between the emic and etic perspectives within the

research. In this sense, my insider knowledge of Eastern Christianity became an immense asset during my work, as people found my interest in Native Russian Orthodoxy natural, and my presence in the community acceptable.

1.3. “The Theoretical Candor”

“Ethnographic validity may be assessed according to three canons: theoretical candor, the ethnographer’s path, and fieldnote evidence” (Sanjek 1990: 395).

In the previous parts of this chapter I have described what Sanjek called the ethnographer’s path, and the fieldnote evidence, in addition to providing background information to my “intensely personal experience” (Sanjek 1990: 398) of the fieldwork. In the remainder of this chapter I am focusing on unfolding the theoretical approach, religious syncretism, I selected to frame my ethnographic material.

I am undoubtedly in debt to a number of excellent researchers, who have taken up the subjects of Russian America and Russian Orthodoxy in Alaska as the focus of their works in the past four decades. Although Russian Orthodoxy in Alaska has been in the center of attention in the past, for the most part, it was mostly studied from a historical and/or theological point of view. Anthropological research and inquiry on this subject is actually rather rare; although, those involved in such studies have produced exceptional scholarship and developed several theoretical approaches to the subject (Black 1981, 1992, 2004, Dauenhauer 1997, Kan 1983, 1996, 1999, Mousalimas 1995, 2003, Oleksa 1987, 1993, Znamenski 1996, 1999, 2003). The case of Alaskan Russian Orthodoxy itself is quite unique, as there is no other area in the world where Orthodoxy has had such outstanding success among Native peoples and cultures. It is largely due to a combination of several factors and usually summarized in four points: small number of Russians present in the Russian American colony, culturally sensitive approach of Orthodox clergy, highly stratified organization and complex rituality of Orthodoxy, and active involvement of the Native people of Alaska. Consequently, the following sub-chapter will explore these concepts, drawing on the scholarship on Alaskan Russian Orthodoxy, and at the same time connecting them to general ideas on religious syncretism.

Religious syncretism in itself is a controversial subject especially within anthropological theory. For that reason, I feel compelled to clarify some points in regards to previous applications and my own understandings of the concept; also to map out ways I have applied it in my search for “ethnographic validity”. Finally, at the end of this chapter, I will give a brief description of my own contribution to the concept of religious syncretism and the process of creating analogies based on conceptualizations of exact cultural meanings.

1.3.1 Russian Orthodoxy in Alaska

The active involvement of the Russian Orthodox Church, as mentioned above, is commonly shared, discussed, and incorporated into all anthropological works on Alaskan Russian Orthodoxy. These factors display important and distinctive characteristics that played an active role in the process of missionary discourse shaping the various indigenous groups’ reactions toward the “new religion” and religious ideas. At the same time, missionization and conversion is not a one-way interaction, but a conversation (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991) between the missionizer and the missionized. By accepting, actively seeking, or vigorously refusing alliance and association with alien religions, people make a conscious decision regarding their own future, and identify themselves in relevance to the various agencies occupying their ever-changing religious landscape.

Consequently, it is natural to pose the question of incentive regarding the active Native involvement in the bureaucratic life of the Russian American colony and the Russian Orthodox Church. The answer to this dilemma is rather complex.

Russian America was essentially run through the Russian American Company (RAC), regarded as an extension of the Crown; however, with the arrival of the first Russian Orthodox Mission to Alaska, the power relations in the colony were realigned as the Church followed its own, thousand-year-old, missionary agenda. Orthodoxy and Orthodox missionary work is often described in terms of Sts. Cyril and Method, Apostles of the Slavs, who had emphasized the importance of using local vernacular in religious services and everyday interactions. Accordingly, the missionaries sent to Alaska were

forewarned to behave as if they “were guests” and instead of immediately focusing on gaining converts, they have often spent a considerable time to adjust to the local circumstances. They were not merely tolerated, but learned to live the local way of life and to speak the language. Therefore, the Orthodox Church and the priests accepted the everyday realities of a particular culture or community, and their religious agenda was exceptionally tolerant towards cultural differences (Kitromilides 1996: 206); in fact, church rules were oftentimes adjusted to accommodate local traditions (Black 2004, Dauenhauer 1997, Kan 1996, 1999, Mousalimas 1995, 2003, Oleksa 1987, 1993, Znamenski 2003).⁹ Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that Westernization is not automatically equitable with Christianization (Mousalimas 1995: 225), as there was a major difference in the Orthodox approach to local Native cultures and people compared to other religions of Western Christianity, resulting in not only voluntary and high-intensity involvement in the Church during the colonial period, but also in a long-lasting legacy of Orthodoxy in Alaska. Russian Orthodoxy did not require major life-style changes from the Native people of Alaska, in part, because the centuries old Orthodox missionary practice placed high value on understanding and learning local languages and traditions. Furthermore, this missionary approach coincided and was reinforced by the Russian colonial administration’s reliance on local people in the everyday life of Russian America, which resulted in the creation of the Creole class. Orthodoxy was the only religion present in the life of the Russian American colony, and as such, it had an over one hundred year “head start” compared to the other religions that were introduced to Alaska after the sale to the United States. Additionally, Creoles and Aleuts were part of the colony’s social hierarchy, and because of the Church’s position within the colonial system, Creoles and Aleuts were also Orthodox. By the time other religions came along, the Native people of Russian America had already developed an understanding and expectation of missionization, which did not coincide with the missionary agenda of Western Christianity.

At the same time, it is also important to acknowledge that the level of transmittance and acceptance of Orthodoxy is ultimately influenced by the particular group’s situation and motivation for conversion (Znamenski 1999: 8). Accordingly, in the

⁹ As for example modes of fasting, schedule of services, matrimony etc.

early colonial period, the Church stepped up to advocate the rights of the “Americans” and provided protection from certain abusive practices of the RAC. Originally, the Orthodox clergy was dispatched to the colony to provide spiritual support and to serve the needs of the Russian citizens, and thus, was placed in the care of the RAC. However, it soon became clear that the Company and the Church had very different ideas regarding their own, and each other’s, role in this situation. After the replacement of the first governor of Russian-America, Alexander Andreevich Baranov, and the arrival of Fr. Ioann Veniaminov¹⁰, an Orthodox priest first posted to Unalaska, the relationship between the Church and the Company became more harmonious, and the Church participated in the colonial effort just as much as the colonial bureaucracy followed the Church’s agenda in interacting with the local Native population.

This cooperative relationship resulted in the training of Native clergy, which also reflected the Russian colonial sentiment and practice of accepting Native Alaskans as fellow human beings. Consequently, the training of Native clergy had an enormous impact on what is often referred to as the “indigenization” of Russian Orthodoxy in Alaska. By having Native Alaskan priests serving their own, or other Native communities, in the Orthodox Faith, the Russians successfully made two important steps that other Western colonizers were unwilling to take. First of all, by allowing Natives to assume the roles, carry out the duties, and enjoy the benefits of prestigious clerical positions, the Native people of Alaska became actively invested in the well-being, maintenance, and care of the Church and the faith. Secondly, the Russians did not simply relinquish an important power-position to the local Natives¹¹; rather, they made Russian Orthodoxy desirable to them. The general Russian approach of tolerance towards many local customs, in addition to not requiring the abandonment of the local way of life helped to bring Orthodoxy to Native Alaskans to the extent that many of them, who have preserved their Orthodox faith, regard it as their own religion, and today Russian Orthodoxy in Alaska is often considered indigenous (Black 1992: 101).

¹⁰ Later, the bishop of Kamchatka, the Aleutians and Russian America, later the metropolitan of Moscow and all Russia, and since 1977, St. Innocent, the Enlightener of North America.

¹¹ A priest was a priest, a servant of God, fulfilling God’s will, regardless of ethnic origin; hence, the deference and respect due to his clerical standing always had to be observed by Russian and non-Russian members of the Church alike. Also, saints demonstrate the process by which the Church embraces cultural diversity yet, at the same time, extends the potential of reaching sanctity regardless of ethnic origin (Oleksa 1993: 193).

Naturally, Russian Orthodoxy in Alaska is different from Russian Orthodoxy in Russia in many aspects; moreover, Orthodox traditions, especially due to this Orthodox approach of accommodating certain local needs, vary from village to village even within the state. The reason for these variations can be explained with certain concepts present in the process of conversion, as well as with idiosyncrasies resulting from specific local circumstances and characteristics.

For Native people the combination of a variety of religious ideas was most likely non-problematic. The idea of religious exclusivity is a Euro-American notion, and often quoted as one of the key factors of miscommunication in the process of religious conversion (Assimeng 1978, Burch 1994), and in the Alaskan context it mostly had no negative connotations.¹² Orthodoxy was first brought to Alaskan communities by Russian *promyshlenniki* along with notions of Russian popular beliefs, and even after the establishment of the Church in the colony, priestly visits were, to say the least, irregular. For a period of time, Native, Russian popular, and Orthodox traditions and understandings of religion mixed and interacted without much outside influence. To an extent, the results of this interplay is still discernable, and often regarded as a positive effect, adding a Native “flavor” to the Orthodox traditions of Alaska, and highlighting the ingenious ability of Alaska Natives to adapt to their ever changing circumstances (Oleksa 1987: 25).¹³ Meanwhile, it would be a mistake to assume that all Native peoples of Russian America converted to Orthodoxy only on a nominal level (Burch 1994, Znamenski 2003).¹⁴ While it is true that the first generation of converts engaging in the

¹² The most well known example is the encounter between St. Innocent and the shaman Smirennikov, who was healing the sick by asking for help from a spiritual power, and whom St Innocent declared to be a healer by the grace of God and encouraged him to continue his work (Mousalimas 1993, Oleksa 1987).

¹³ Father Michael Oleksa in his publications and public talks, many of which are given in Native villages and Native Orthodox communities, often stresses the ideas of addition and adaptation which have always been part of Alaska Native cultures, and have allowed Native people to survive many ecological, social, and cultural changes in the past. In such a cultural environment, Orthodoxy was well received, as the Church approached cultural and ethnic diversity with tolerance and without the objective of “replacing the ‘old’ but [rather] by completing and fulfilling it” (Oleksa 1987: 25).

¹⁴ Nominal conversion usually refers to the first level of interaction that results in false interpretation of the events from the perspectives of both parties involved. While missionaries often rejoice in their success of saving souls, those “converted” usually have no understanding on the expectation of religious exclusivity, and only in later generations does nominal conversion turn into an actual, exclusive, spiritual experience.

process of redefining of religious (self-) identity often lack thorough dogmatic training, rather, their devotion manifest in the ritual aspects of the religion.¹⁵ In contrast however, second and subsequent generations that were brought up within the new religion often develop a high level of sincere devotion, faith, and loyalty towards the new religion and its practitioners.¹⁶ Naturally, to this generation the formerly alien religious practice has become an integral part of their traditions and sometimes it is even referred to as “native”. During the period of contact, nominal conversion was probably the most prevalent form of Orthodoxy. Later, however, it was replaced with a period where Native people were trying to make sense out of the newly encountered and acquired religious ideas.

Finding various aspects of Orthodoxy that on some level corresponded (Mousalimas 2003: 88) to their own traditional ideas of spirituality, was a crucial step towards integration, which resulted in the articulation of a Native Russian Orthodox tradition that engaged the members of the Church beyond this nominal level. It is important to note that Mousalimas also emphasizes that such correspondence expresses similarity and not equality. Thus, masks, traditional mediums of rituals (Fienup-Riordan 1986: 45), are not equated with icons, the Orthodox mediums of theological concepts; rather, their meaning is connected on a theoretical level, allowing Native Alaskans to grasp the dogmatism of Orthodoxy (Mousalimas 2003: 134).

The role of human agency in the conversion process was crucial and the daily interactions between Russians and Natives resulted in mutual recognition and acceptance of cultural diversities, and in some cases even similarities were found that were appreciated on both sides.¹⁷ Ideas originating from Russian popular religion were

¹⁵ Especially, if the society had their own elaborate ritual practices, which to some level, could be equated – or made to correspond – with the new religious rituals. In some cases, missionaries had to construct new rituals to accommodate local needs (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991: 234).

¹⁶ This phenomenon can be seen in many Alaskan contexts, and in some versions of Latin-American Catholicism.

¹⁷ “... some central symbols of the Native populations [...] coincided with those of Orthodoxy. The Aleuts, like the Orthodox, prayed to the east. The symbolism of light was central and associated with good. A bird represented the spirit, the Creator. In both religious systems water was a medium of healing, transformation, and purification. Fasting and abstinence were practiced by participants in both religions. Confession [...] among some Native groups [...] was also practiced as a mode of individual and group purification” (Black 2004: 230).

welcomed and absorbed by Native traditions, as they made Orthodoxy more accessible and tangible for locals.

Accessibility is a key word in this relationship between Russians and Natives, as well as for the process by which Russian Orthodoxy became a Native (and native) religion. From creating the infrastructures to performing the correct daily services, Orthodoxy in Alaska was heavily reliant on local Native people since the arrival of the first Orthodox Mission. Alaska Native people built and maintained churches, collected and provided money for obtaining the necessary religious paraphernalia, organized and supervised daily attendance, the observation of Church rules, and regulations. In addition to Native clergy, local Native laity was fundamental in running the Church and maintaining the faith in remote areas, where priests visited only once a year to perform marriages, baptize and chrismate¹⁸ children and new members, and to bless the graves of the deceased. Local deacons, sub-deacons, *starosta* (caretakers), choir leaders, Orthodox sister and brotherhood chairs and members, all had access to power and authority originating from their position in the Church which they used partially in their successful endeavor to keep the faith alive in their communities (Csoba DeHass 2007: 215). Participation in Orthodox ritual activity was available to anyone on an every day basis, and while it was encouraged, it was never forced, or at least, not by priests and missionaries, but by local social pressure. On the one hand, in most cases, there were no priests in such communities to “force” people to attend services. On the other hand, many Elders remarked on their childhood experiences as they were “made to go to Church” by their parents, grandparents and godparents. For them “going to Church” was just as much a social activity as a religious one, because religious participation was reinterpreted within the local social framework. In the specific case of Nanwalek social hierarchy and religious hierarchy was conceptualized as analogous, which created the authority employed in social pressure prompting religious participation. In most Alaskan communities, regardless of ethnic background, Orthodoxy became an internalized religion¹⁹ (Barker 1993: 214), based on a complex relationship and conversation

¹⁸ In Orthodoxy a person receives the gift of the Holy Spirit by chrismation, which is a person’s anointment with oil. Chrismation and baptism are usually administered together, especially to newborn babies.

¹⁹ Internalized religion in the sense that in most cases parts of the Orthodox tradition became a part of (Native) culture, to the point of complete internalization. It was no longer possible to separate

(Comaroff and Comaroff 1991) between the parties involved in the colonial experience. At the same time, Orthodoxy also took on a life of its own in the various Native communities, and continued to adapt to accommodate the idiosyncrasies of the local socio-cultural milieu.

Lastly, Orthodoxy was not forgotten with the sale of Russian America to the United States. On the contrary, a part of what Native Russian Orthodoxy in Alaska is today was deeply influenced by the new American policy, which was aggressive, aimed for assimilation, and was often carried out under the auspices of Western Christianity. This time westernization and Christianization did go hand in hand, which prompted a sudden response of mass conversion to Orthodoxy by many Native communities (Kan 1996, 1983, 1999, Znamenski 1996, 1999). In order to cope with the demands of the new American society, some Alaskan Natives decided to turn to Orthodox Christianity, which to them was the most appealing Christian religion allowing room for individual cultural traditions and interpretations.²⁰ By taking on Eastern Christianity, people hoped to evade the American attempts at westernization and assimilation, and what they found was satisfaction and spiritual fulfillment in many of the practices of the Orthodox Church. Remembrance of the dead, celebration of Divine Liturgy, organized festivities on church holidays, and the individual acknowledgement of those partaking in Holy Communion or participating in other sacraments, were all practices that corresponded to traditional practices on a spiritual level. By engaging in these practices, Alaska Natives actively participated in the deliberate creation of a new Native self-identity through the adoption of the Russian Orthodox faith. The absorption of Orthodoxy into the local religion and lifestyle allowed people to re-create their ethnic and group identity, and it became "...a tool[...] for solving various social and spiritual problems" caused by the changes and expectations of American society (Znamenski 1999:8).

the religious from the cultural, and people embraced this new concept as their own original tradition. Hence "internalized religion" here is not used in the sense of strict Barkerien dichotomy of external-internal conversion. In this case, there is no separation between Church and community; the two are essentially one and the same.

²⁰ In the 1880's a sudden interest of high-ranking Tlingit leaders in Orthodox Christianity took the clergy by surprise, as they were besieged with requests for priests, baptisms, and permissions to build churches, a phenomenon Kan, in part, explains with the respectful approach of Orthodoxy towards Tlingit culture and traditions (Kan 1983: 131).

In sum, the Native peoples of Alaska, by taking on Orthodoxy and a new religious identity, skillfully created an additional level of social network. This network was created in a way that allowed room for negotiation in various social situations, as for example selecting godparents or wedding sponsors. In my work with Sugpiaq Russian Orthodoxy I was constantly reminded of the flexibility of this relationship between religion and Native culture, and the tremendous skill and devotion of the people in maintaining this ongoing process.

1.3.2. Religious Syncretism

In this dissertation I examine the formation and ongoing articulation of Sugpiaq Russian Orthodoxy, as it is understood and practiced in Nanwalek, Alaska, through the framework of religious syncretism. In my discussion I follow the ideas put forth by Shaw and Stewart (1994: 7) suggesting that the importance of syncretism does not lie in mere identification as such, rather in the recognition of a specific process that is religious in nature, and incorporates power and agency into its discourse. Syncretism, as the “politics of religious synthesis” includes both the discourses about and the processes involved in religious synthesis, and becomes an analytical tool in further understanding cultural and religious phenomena.

Religious syncretism has been a controversial and contested term within, as well as outside of, the discipline of anthropology in the past several decades. While the debates surrounding this concept originate from the changing meaning and various associations of the word, anthropology has had its own problems in clarifying and defining syncretism both as a word and as a concept.

The origin of the word ‘syncretism’ is traced back to Plutarch, who used it to describe the “coming together of the Cretans”, and it is most likely connected to the word *syngkhrasis* that holds the meaning of “a mixing together” (MacIvar 1924, Leopold 2004, Rudolph 2004, Shaw and Stewart 1994, Stewart 2004). Syncretism thus became a concept to describe the “blending of religious ideas and practices, by means of which either one set adopts more or less thoroughly the principles of another” (MacIvar 1924: 156). Through the centuries, however, the word acquired a negative connotation, and became associated with the production of something “impure”, mixing the genuine

elements of two or more traditions to produce a contaminated state that is deemed disputable, even condemnable. The term, through extensive reference and application within the discipline of comparative religion, became to be associated with conquest and colonization, as it was used in Hellenistic and Roman empire building endeavours to establish legitimacy in the new territory (Shaw and Stewart 1994: 4). In this sense, syncretism went through a perfect turnaround in its meaning, as it was not “coming together” anymore, rather it became the facilitator of imperialistic expansion that is used not to defend one’s own, but to help overtake the cultural “other”.

Although this specific meaning was laid to rest in the 20th century, and the term was introduced to anthropology to describe the result of cultural contact between two or more entities, the negative connotation survived, and accompanies syncretism into the present (Herskovits 1958). In addition to retaining a certain level of negative meaning, syncretism also struggled to find a lucid area of study; previously it was not clearly determined if syncretism was indeed restricted to religious phenomena, or if it was interchangeable with other terms such as bricolage or *mélange*. Furthermore, the acceptance of the term’s authority to describe a particular religious phenomenon still did not resolve the problems deriving from its previous applications and usage (Droogers and Greenfield 2001:31).

Despite these problematic origins, for the purposes of this study, it has been the ideal theoretical framework, as syncretism is never a simple borrowing of foreign elements; rather it is an adaptation process with the selection, interpretation, and incorporation of culturally specific and meaningful constituents.

The creation of meaning has been regarded as a capacity of culture, and through the process of religious syncretism where “meaning is bestowed upon an invisible, not empirically verifiable, supernatural reality” (Droogers 2004: 218) people connect religious and secular constituents. According to Droogers, this religious reality can be interpreted and integrated into other aspects of life by the use of metaphors that allow human participants to turn “supernatural reality” into a more tangible and familiar entity that is in the secular domain of culture. Metaphors, which are essential components of religious practice and communication, link the two domains together by seemingly arbitrary meaning that is created by the actors participating in the process.

This logic of metaphors can also be approached through the previously mentioned correspondence between masks and icons (Mousalimas 2003) in Alaskan Orthodoxy. Although the two religious concepts are not equivalent, they are definitely similar, based on the ontological connection Native people created between them. They are not only culturally distant, but also represent two different religious traditions. Nevertheless, based on their capacity and the position they hold in religious thought, namely both masks and icons being mediums of theological concepts, they were placed into the same Sugpiaq ontological category.

To be exact, the ontological link seems arbitrary from the outside, from an etic point of view *only*, as it is based on the way of thinking of those within the process. Yet for those within, from the emic point of view, it is quite natural and requires no further explanation. Furthermore, as the ontological link is created from an emic perspective, to make sense for those within, any etic considerations are no longer relevant to understand the new emic reinterpretation. Additionally, such connections need not rest strictly on religious connections; after all, the strictly circumscribed idea of religion is a Euro-American concept. Thus by meaningfully connecting the religious ideas to secular ones, based on their own ontological principles, the actors can create an analytical instrument that helps internalize the previously foreign elements, which is in this specific case Russian. As an example, the singing of *kolyadi*, Christmas songs, during religious services, and in the house to house choreographed visitations (Starring), was introduced to Alaska by Father Iakov Korchinskii in 1905 (Oleksa 1993: 188). During the past century, it spread to all the different villages of Alaska with a Russian Orthodox community. These songs are always in Russian, and people in the past had learned them by listening to them, quite often without knowing any Russian at all. They grew up participating in Starring and listening to and singing *kolyadi*. Today in Nanwalek, these songs are sung outside of this particular religious context, as for example during a Christmas celebration organized in the school. The original conceptual connection was made on the basis of a religious song, yet by acquiring additional cultural meaning, it became an inseparable part of Christmas celebration, a traditional, cultural aspect of “Sugpiatness”.

For those within the process, from an emic perspective, such meaning is natural (Morrow 1992, Rudolph 2004), and the metaphoric connections become metonymic. In

the metonymic connection there is no separation between Russian and Sugpiaq traditions anymore, as they are combined together into one. Therefore, in the metonymic understanding, there is no clear distinction between religious and secular domains, due to the newly emerging synthesized social structure.

It is important to recognize that if metaphors are the way people make sense of the things surrounding them, their constructions are continuous, while the logic they are based on is constant. Consequently, the metonyms that are the emic view of the syncretic outcome at a particular time in a particular space are constantly changing in order to accommodate for the ensuing social-cultural changes.

While this could be one approach to syncretism, others believe that there is an “underlying mechanism of selection” as (Martin 2004: 291) that governs the course of the syncretic process, and which is connected to the way people make sense of the world. These underlying mechanisms of selection can also be regarded as the logic of the metaphor, the basis of the correspondence, or the process of intuitive ontologies. According to Boyer (1994: 154), all religious systems are “constrained by the activation of intuitive ontologies” that are not culturally transmitted, and therefore can be present in all religious concepts. Martin claims that such approach does not deny the “cultural content” of the formations, only the effective participation of culture in the process (Martin 2004: 290). While cognition can be a facilitator of religious syncretism, it is still fully connected to cultural content. Without the introduction of *kolyadi* to Alaska, no children would have sung them a hundred years later in the school’s Christmas celebration in Nanwalek.

Hence, intuitive ontologies (Boyer 1994), present in all human situations, can be used to make sense of culturally specific elements, and to make it possible to internalize polyphonic or even contradictory religious ideas, and they are inseparable from the cultural content.

Fauconnier and Turner suggest a similar approach to their analytical idea, conceptual blending, “a general cognitive process [...] that operates over mental spaces as inputs,” in which process mental spaces are used in thinking to engender understanding, while input spaces originate in two (or more) different conceptual frameworks (Fauconnier and Turner 1996: 117). To create a blend, inputs are taken from different frameworks and conceptualized through the cognitive process of the mental

space. Blends, however, are not merely the product of the cognitive process, because they can be reused in further blending as inputs. For this reason Fauconnier and Turner emphasize the relationship between the blend and the input spaces, without which the blend would not fulfill its purpose in cognition (Fauconnier and Turner 1996: 116). While such blending is not a consciously recognized act, it can be accentuated within a certain cultural context, in addition to its complex origins from two or more separate structures, which provide possibilities for further modifications. When thinking about any kind of “cultural innovation” it becomes clear that people categorize and classify newly encountered ideas and concepts based on their already existing mental picture of their surroundings, whether it as simple as using plastic tubs instead of suitcases when traveling (fits frozen foods, more durable, reusable for other purposes, more comfortable to carry and transport on ATVs and snow-machines), or as complicated as the theological dogma of a new religion. Plastic tubs, not specifically designed for the purposes of extensive travel, enter people’s mental space as an input from one framework, while the need to have some kind of container for the transportation of objects in between places is another input space from a different conceptual framework. People connect these two inputs in their mental space through the process of cognition while creating a new space, the blend, with its own socially and culturally meaningful characteristics. The blend, in this context, is people’s own, unique devise, which inherits characteristics from their original input spaces, yet now are viewed by people within a specific framework. They are placed in the category of “luggage,” alongside with suitcases, duffle bags, backpacks etc. They are not stationary containers for the simple storage of objects, but mobile containers for the transportation of things during travel. Yet, blends are flexible concepts and can be recycled as inputs in further blending. For example tubs can be recognized and conceptualized as the most ideal mobile containers for the transportation of things in short distances (fish, fire wood etc.) or mailing things, in addition to long-distance travel.

Leopold suggests that conceptual blending is a linguistic theory that helps to understand the process of syncretism, yet she also warns not to ignore the fact that syncretism “is still a phenomenon restricted by rules from the social sphere of human action” (Leopold 2004: 148). For this reason conceptual blending, an expression suggesting an almost automatic mixing process, cannot accurately characterize religious syncretism, where the participating actors strategically select certain cultural (both

religious and secular) elements, which they re-interpret to fit their own perceptions of the world. In fact, syncretism is frequently affected by social structures other than religious, which influences the choices actors make during the synthesizing process as well as the emerging new structure (Droogers and Greenfield 2001: 36).²¹

A correlating approach to religious syncretism is the connection of human adaptation as a response to rapid changes of the environment (Black 1994: 219). Black emphasizes the creation of new ideology and rituals through the process of syncretism, in addition to the importance of connection such processes provide with the old ideology. In other words, syncretism allows for the maintenance of continuity with the old, and facilitates the emergence of the new, in order to help humans cope with changes that have transpired.²²

The prominence of adaptation facilitated by syncretistic processes is a central element of Sjørsløv's study as well. In her study of possession among Brazilian *Umbanda* and *Candomblé*, she deduces that "syncretism provides the instrument and the opportunity for constant creativity and adaptation to new challenges and integrations of history" (Sjørsløv 2001: 132). Furthermore, syncretism also allows for the self-positioning of the participants due to the flexibility of the process and thus the interpretation and re-interpretation of self-identify. In this sense, syncretism not only helps to integrate different cultural elements, but also can mediate polyphonic and contradictory practices, by opening up new spheres, previously controlled by one hegemonic tradition (Sjørsløv 2001: 132). Also, in addition to emphasizing the endless varieties of religious phenomena emerging from the synthesizing process, Sjørsløv calls attention to the limitations caused by cultural elements interacting in the specific situation. Similar to the process of self-identification, which is largely considered to be a choice of the person, syncretism also needs to be viewed in regards to the limits created

²¹ Droogers and Greenfield connect syncretism with the idea of entrepreneurship, described as a process where "individuals cognitively internalize and then re-conceptualize and transform structures" to underline the interdependence of global and local spheres and the power relations that are one of the major factors in the formation of religious syncretism (Droogers and Greenfield 2001: 36). Naturally, the idea of "cultural entrepreneurship" suggests a more conscious approach to syncretism, and accentuates the role of human agency and participation in the selective process instead of an "underlying mechanism."

²² Black also remarks on the universality of the phenomenon: "this tendency toward syncretism appears to be universal human social response to changing ecological conditions during times of inter-group contact" (Black 1994: 214).

by cultural institutions (Sjørølev 2001: 135). As the definition of self-identity often involves strategic interpretations and expressions of momentarily and contextually chosen elements of the culture, the application and interpretation of certain syncretic cultural elements can also be governed by the same ideas.

Juliana Flinn uses the framework of syncretism as a coping mechanism that allows the incorporation of foreign religious elements into one's identity in her study on Pulapese Roman Catholicism. She states that the reinterpretation of Pulapese identity through the incorporation of Catholicism was profoundly shaped by the sociocultural changes that transpired in Micronesia in the past forty years. In fact, for the people of Pulap, Catholicism became inseparable from being a "good" Pulapese, as it helped them to separate "what was 'pagan' [from] what was 'just custom'," and at the same time allowed them to access outside knowledge and opportunities (Flinn 1990: 225). In addition, the Pulapese take pleasure in being a single denominational cultural group, and actively resist any other religious proselytization, as Pulap is the most traditional island in the area, which they contribute to their religious unanimity. Undoubtedly, Catholicism changed many aspects of Pulapese life, yet it also made it possible for the people to reinterpret their identity based on the changing sociocultural factors and on their view of what exactly constitutes "Pulapeneseness". By interpreting and internalizing Catholicism, the Pulapese were able to redefine their own identity in such a way that facilitated their adaptation to their new circumstances. The importance of such religious syncretism, in my view, lies in the fact that by actively participating in the selection of culturally significant elements that became a part of the new identity, the Pulapese gained control over both the religious and the social spheres of their culture, and at the same time, acquired the possibility to access further foreign resources if they choose so.

Although it is difficult to distinguish different modes of syncretism, the divergence between consciously and unconsciously created syntheses is generally accepted (Colpe 1977, Rudolph 2004). Rudolph suggests that syncretism can happen in both conscious and unconscious dimensions, but it is exclusively the problem of those involved in the creation of conscious syncretism. It is their responsibility to internalize the foreign elements into the religious structure, by "'interlock[ing]' [...] religious and cultural elements of different origins into a situation of contact" (Rudolph 2004: 82). Therefore, Rudolph suggests, syncretism should be regarded as a temporal creation with a

distinct beginning and end, as it is a transitional dynamic of religion that resolves power relations between foreign and familiar constituents. Rudolph's idea resonates with the previously discussed underlying mechanism or logic of metaphors and intuitive ontologies, in approaching syncretism from the direction of human cognition. Moreover, it also places emphasis on the seeming arbitrariness of the connection between foreign and familiar cultural elements, which are in fact, linked to each other on the basis of specific conceptual system of thought. Yet, it negates the fluidity of syncretism by assigning a timeframe to it, and regarding it as both an outcome and a process.

Syncretism, now viewed as an innate characteristic of religion, perpetually creates and re-creates elements within a tradition that are on the one hand connected to the past, yet on the other, provide opportunities for people to cope with new circumstances. While such a presentation seems to attribute an almost automatic nature to syncretism, it would be unwise to neglect the importance of human agency in the process. In reality, syncretism could not, and would not, happen without individual involvement and even though there is a certain mechanism to the process, it should not be reified. Continual change forces people to make constant adjustments in order to accommodate their momentary needs and wants. As syncretism is generated by human participation, the course of the process and the results themselves are previously unforeseeable; however, they are not completely random. People's reaction to new phenomena is governed by their previous experiences, their cultural logic and intellectual framework, historical, social and economical factors. Syncretism works in a certain milieu, and people use "tools" that are available to them in order to solve their existing problems. In this sense the thought process of syncretism is limited by the given environment's cultural and social elements that actually participate and interact in the specific situation, and for this reason syncretism needs to be viewed in regards to the limits imposed by the specific cultural institutions (Sjørlev 2001:135). It is important to have as thorough understanding as possible of all the factors that shape people's everyday experience in order to delineate the various elements that interact in syncretism.

The results of such processes in a given environment are not only diverse, but also highly unstable. Needs, problems, and conditions change all the time, thus the coping mechanism of syncretism (Black 1994, Sjørlev 2001) that is available for people to use in these situations usually produce solutions that are specific in nature, and leave

room for further adjustments and change, as "... they are continually reconstructed through ongoing processes of synthesis and erasure" (Shaw and Stewart 1994: 7). Therefore, syncretism is quite situational; the elements can be easily changed, adjusted, and even discarded, should the need arise for such drastic measures, while simultaneously maintaining a broader perspective that encompasses local ideas and concepts. Furthermore, the decision to discard or carry on certain traditions is greatly governed by the interactions of numerous viewpoints and even after reaching momentary consensus, the evaluation of a particular syncretic tradition can rapidly change according to change in context and milieu. What was considered desirable at one point might be deemed outdated or inadequate in the new conditions, or just simply downplayed in order to emphasize different elements that are more advantageous in the present situation.

In this study I regard syncretism neither as the mere product of a mixing process, nor as the process of synthesis in isolation. Instead, I suggest considering syncretism as an inherent characteristic of religious phenomena that is, and can be, used to interpret and explore the various processes involved in religious adaptation integration, and interaction in relation to a cultural system.²³ To follow such an approach, it is necessary to reorient the previously accepted usage of the word and the implication associated with the term.

The first question that arises in regards to syncretism is the clarification of its religious aspect. Although syncretism is habitually regarded as a religious phenomenon, it is important to note that religion, as a category in itself, is the product of Euro-American thought. While all peoples had ideas and notions of the supernatural and supranormal, they seldom manifested in a detached and discrete category; rather, these ideas were generally intertwined with other aspects of life. From the emic perspective, these notions were regarded as parts of everyday life and not necessarily marked as exclusively religious phenomena. From the etic point of view however, they were often

²³ Through culture as a system people are able to organize contradictory elements in such a way that they makes sense to them, for those within the culture, without creating conceptual dilemmas. Geertz refers to this understanding of culture as the "octopoid system," because "culture moves rather like an octopus [does] by disjointed movements" including directly observable modes of thought as well as "less tightly coherent, but nonetheless ordered [...] confluences of partial integrations, partial incongruencies, and partial independencies" (Geertz 2000: 408).

dissected from “other parts of culture” to be categorized and declared as “religious”. Therefore it is important to recognize that in syncretism it is not always two “religious” traditions that are integrated, rather, one of them is often a cultural worldview, carrying meanings conceptualized by Euro-American thought as “religious”, brought together by a series of negotiations and synthesis. Therefore, religious syncretism cannot be examined without looking at the larger cultural and social setting in which this process of internalization, the politics of religious synthesis, takes place.

Furthermore, indigenous ideas and notions of “religiosity” were often regarded and described as unvarying, despite the fact that they were affected by both inter and intra-group changes. As change is a natural characteristic of culture, and religious conception is a cultural phenomenon, it cannot be considered completely static, even though it is frequently referred to as such, especially in a ritual or stylized context. Instead, it should be regarded as consistent, as people within the cultural group maintain a certain level of consistency by employing syncretism for the internalization of new religious elements and for the re-interpretation of the old ones. Thus syncretism is “religious” in nature, but it is not restricted to the realm of religiosity and it actively interacts with other cultural elements and notions.

Secondly, syncretism, that is here now assumed to have some kind of religious aspect, is often associated with colonialism, and colonial power relations. While traditions most often referred to as ‘syncretistic’ originated from a colonial setting, it seems more accurate to state that syncretism will more likely occur in a situation where unequal power relations prevail. Furthermore, syncretism is obviously not a one-way process; rather, it is similar to conversion. It is an exchange of ideas and practices (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991), therefore it cannot be assumed that cultural (or political) dominance will automatically result in religious dominance.²⁴ Establishing colonialism as a prerequisite for syncretism would result in attributing “purity” to world religions, which

²⁴ For an example, revitalization movements are clearly direct responses to unbalanced power relations, drawing on the empowerment that can be gained from religious interpretations and discourse. Furthermore, many case studies suggest that religious syncretism can be a venue for cultural and social resistance, and the articulation of numerous new religious traditions are influenced by the desire for establishing independent indigenous religious communities (Bastide 2004: 136, Greenfield 2001: 63, Morrison 1990: 430 etc). Such practices, that are usually described as “syncretic” in nature, combine some core elements of a major world religion with the local interpretation, and while the resulting religious practice, or church, is sometimes disapproved by the original world religion, it is generally quite popular amongst the once “colonized.”

they obviously do not possess, and consequently ordering local religious practice into an inferior position. By separating syncretism from the habitual colonial association, it becomes possible to concentrate on the various processes that make up syncretism that is an element of all and every religious tradition.²⁵ After all, without employing such syncretistic processes no religion would have had the ability to adapt to local circumstances, thus by perpetual change and variation, become a world religion, or even a local religion that survives continuous cultural change.

Consequently, it is important to recognize the enormous variety of phenomena that can participate in engendering syncretism, and which are not strictly restricted to the realm of religiosity. In fact any change, especially rapid change, produces the need for some kind of 'instrument' that enable people to cope with the new circumstances (Black 1994: 219). Syncretism, if regarded as an intrinsic characteristic of religious phenomena, can become the instrument that enables people to create new meanings and reorient old ideologies without rupturing continuity, and ultimately to find alternatives for previously established practices that are now deemed ineffectual. Through syncretism people do not create a single, comprehensive, and inclusive body of traditions, but rather they use it in facilitating continuous change by maintaining the idea of authenticity, as it is viewed from within a culture. Incorporating the idea of authenticity into the discourse on syncretism is inescapable, because questions of authenticity and legitimacy are ultimately decided within the culture and not outside of it, which leads to the further investigations on the relationship between syncretism and identity.²⁶

Religious syncretism and identity are similar concepts as they are both highly situational and extremely flexible, thus facilitating the alteration of the ideas according to the needs of the parties involved. Furthermore, both concepts are intimately linked to the idea of authenticity, as a major force of justification for their existence. Authenticity is ultimately created and defined within the culture, thus the different elements that constitute and express identity are able to do so, because they are invested with the authority of authenticity. Authenticity does not have to be equaled to purity, neither to accuracy in the stricter sense; people can, and often do, claim authenticity in cases where

²⁵ I do not deny that colonialism is often a dominant factor (e.g. Bastide 2004, Greenfield 2001, Mosse 1994 etc.), but rather point out that the key concept is in unequal power relations in addition to the presence of variety. (E.g. Syncretism as a response to internal change.)

²⁶ Although questions of authenticity and legitimacy can be contested by outside perspectives.

outside influence is clearly detectable, observable, and discernable. In such cases, one of them being religious syncretism, the tradition in question is not just a mere copy of a foreign idea or concept; rather it is an ongoing process of adaptation to the local circumstances.

Lastly, ontological reality has been discussed in connection with the process of syncretism from various approaches (Boyer 1994: 154, Leopold 2004: 148, Martin 2004: 291, Rudolph 2004: 82) and whether the process is embedded in the cultural context or rather follows a mechanism that is not constrained by culture. Creation of meaning has been linked to religious syncretism on the basis of the nature of the process, as syncretism links tangible aspects of life to the more abstract “supernatural reality” (Droogers 2004: 218). The idea that religious syncretism and human cognition are intimately linked is undeniable. Without having a pattern that organizes the process of syncretism, all religions, could be interpreted *only* in their idiosyncratic milieu.²⁷ Although cognition can be viewed as a facilitator for religious syncretism, it cannot be fully separated from culture altogether, as the cultural content itself is the reason for the process to occur in the first place. Rather, intuitive ontologies, present in all human situations, are a venue for making sense of culturally specific elements. Since syncretism is a human activity, the outcome of combining various elements can take many routes, shapes, and forms; therefore it is impossible to predict the actual course of the process in advance. Through the process of syncretism people find analogies between familiar and foreign elements that correspond to each other based on the way they are conceptualized by those within the culture. The act of making such analogies can be considered intuitive, yet their reason for existence is embedded in culture, similarly to their meaning, which is created within the local perception of cultural reality, including religiosity.

1.3.3. On Conceptual Analogy

Placing the phenomenon of contemporary Sugpiaq Russian Orthodoxy within the theoretical framework of religious syncretism is helpful in recognizing its flexible, fluid and ongoing nature. At the same time the concept is not sufficient to completely

²⁷ Naturally, the exact meanings and symbols specific to one religious tradition can be understood only within the wider cultural context.

understand the actual connection, both historical and current, between Sugpiaq people and their Russian Orthodox religion. In my quest to outline how Sugpiat Russian Orthodoxy affected, and at the same time was influenced by, the non-religious spheres of society, I am using the notion of conceptual analogy, which I regard as drawing correlations based on perceived similarities between a local intellectual framework and a foreign religious one, resulting in the internalization of foreign religious ideas into the local cultural environment. Through conceptual analogy it becomes possible to explore the creation of a new religious concept that on the one hand became one of the most expressive elements of Sugpiaq identity, and on the other, influenced other spheres of the local social milieu that are considered to be secular in nature.

Religious landscapes are highly unstable even after the indigenization and internalization of foreign religious concepts, thus the process requires the production of certain mechanisms that allow room for flexibility. Change might be triggered by the appearance of various religions and denominations that in turn, also may change the previously established balance between the original and the already indigenized religion, entailing the constant interpretation and re-interpretation of religious ideas and identities.

Conceptual analogy can be found in all religious discourse including conversion/conversation, religious syncretism and in general, the phenomena of crossing boundaries. Although the nature of the connection between the two entities may or may not be consciously articulated, when such events occur, it creates further integration between the two traditions. It is commonly used in missionary efforts to explain and indigenize various elements and concepts of the alien religion. For example, encouraging the usage of local vernacular during religious services was a widespread Russian Orthodox practice during the colonial area, in conjunction with conscious emphasis on indigenous literacy, such as Ivan Pan'kov's and Ioann Veniaminov's work in creating the Aleut alphabet (Black 2004: 247). Similarly, incorporating local examples of everyday life to sermons and parables to explain religious concepts is also prevalent and, particularities aside, have been used in religious missionary practice. Additionally, incorporating local art and ideas of aesthetics into the beautification of religious space and objects, such as beadwork decorations, home made icon stands, or religious clothing are usually encouraged by missionaries in order to enhance the feeling of familiarity of the new religion in local perception.

Yet the creation of connections between old and new religious ideas also occurs spontaneously, as a form of local response to foreign abstract concepts. People in their attempt to decipher and understand unfamiliar concepts tend to conceptualize analogies between their own notions and those newly presented to them. Durkheim describes Aristotle's categories of understanding as "the framework of the intelligence" (1965: 22), which is social in origin because it is impossible to think of any object, concept or idea that is not shaped by collective representation. When a new phenomenon is introduced to the framework, it needs to be processed through the "concentrated special intellectual activity" (Durkheim 1965: 29) inherent in the collective representation of categories in order to become meaningful. If it is not possible to conceptualize an analogy and to perceive the new concept through the local intellectual framework, it is discarded, while those concepts that are successfully viewed to correlate to a particular segment of the framework by a mental analogy are integrated.

According to Bloch (2002: 110) the most important contribution on the correlations between analogy and thought in modern anthropology was Lévi-Strauss' analysis on systems of classification in *The Savage Mind* (1966). Lévi-Strauss explores the significance of analogy within the general framework of "the science of the concrete," which he also refers to as "magical thought" or "mythical thought". He considers mythical thought to be a well-articulated system that is different from scientific thought, "except for the purely formal analogy which brings them together and makes the former a sort of metaphorical expression of the latter" (Lévi-Strauss 1966: 13). Lévi-Strauss also stresses that neither system dominates the other; rather they are different approaches to getting to know the world. Lévi-Strauss' 'bricoleur' is concerned with organizing "odds and ends" into a structure²⁸ in order to bring order to the universe by classification. For this reason Lévi-Strauss considers "mythical thought" as an "intellectual 'bricolage'" (1966: 17) that is created based on an analogy, which he describes in terms of particular criteria.

First of all, the analogy that is used to transform random information to fit the categories of a structure is based on the logic connected to "mythical thought". For this reason, it can be considered as culture, or at least structure, specific. Secondly, the

²⁸ Unlike the scientist, who "create[s] events (changing the world) by means of structures" (Lévi-Strauss 1966: 22)

analogy is created based on form and not on content; although, during the creation of an analogy, a certain amount of content becomes incorporated. For this reason, the “odds and ends” used in the analogy come with the past of the previous usage attached, yet, they can be detached and re-used in future analogies. Finally, because of their past, the elements used in the analogy are multi-vocal and remain such even after their incorporation into the analogy (or, for that matter, after their removal from the analogy). Therefore the creation of the analogy is limited by the available elements, their previous usage, as well as the logic that perceives and connects them as “analogous” (Lévi-Strauss 1966: 35). Naturally, even with such limitations, there are a multitude of possibilities for the creation of a particular analogy.

Based on the criteria described above, I use the word analogy to delineate the specific connection of the elements that engender Sugpiaq Russian Orthodoxy. The “odds and ends” are of Russian and of Sugpiaq in origin, and they are limited by their previous place in their respective intellectual frameworks. Also, the analogy that organizes these elements into the structure of Sugpiaq Russian Orthodoxy is the logic of Sugpiaq people who constantly reorganize and re-frame the categories of their knowledge of the world.

The question, however, still remains: what is exactly being conceptualized in the analogy? According to Mousalimas, people perceive similarities, but not equivalence, between certain structural elements, which he refers to as points of comprehension (Mousalimas 2003). Such point of comprehension is the previously discussed connection between masks and icons, as their meanings in two different religious frameworks (Russian Orthodox and Alaska Native) correspond to one another on an intellectual level. Points of comprehension are concerned strictly with the religious realm, while conceptual analogies connect secular and religious realms. To be precise, conceptual analogies are created between the structural frameworks of religious thoughts that are not separable from the secular aspects of social life.

All religious organizations are comprised of divine and human spheres, when scrutinized from an etic vantage point. The relationship between these two spheres is governed by specific theological concepts pertaining to the particular religious tradition. Because it is necessary to create a (inner-) worldly representation, a religious organization, with – and in order to engage – human participation, there is a sphere that is viewed comprehensively sacred in the emic, while mostly secular, in the etic

consideration. In Russian Orthodoxy, the worldly and otherworldly aspects of the Church are addressed with the theory of infallibility²⁹, which states that the Orthodox Church is infallible, because it is the body of Christ, who is sinless. The individuals alone, however, are not infallible, because they are human, ergo; they are sinful (Ware 1997: 248). When individuals come together in the Church, they still do not achieve individual infallibility, but their togetherness as the Church, the body of Christ, becomes infallible. In Orthodoxy, the same logic applies to the authority associated with organizational positions. The individuals, who fill these positions, as for example bishops, do not become sinless just because they are endowed with a gift from the Holy Spirit through their ordination. “The divine element does not expel the human” as they both work together in a synergy (Ware 1997: 249).

Conceptual analogy is an anthropological concept and not a theological one. In general, it is concerned with the social synthesis of religious concepts, the politics involved in the negotiation process of internalizing a new religious ideology. In particular, I use the idea of conceptual analogy in this dissertation to delineate the dynamics that are involved in the articulation and re-articulation of Sugpiaq Russian Orthodoxy.

While the idea of conceptual analogy is, in part, built upon the logic of the bricoleur, it is not positioned in the concept of bricolage. Bricolage is more overarching in scope than religious syncretism, which specifically explores religious phenomena. Simultaneously, conceptual analogy draws upon the idea of correspondence, but it is not limited only to finding points of comprehensions within the numinous. Instead, conceptual analogy is concerned with the correspondence that people perceive and establish between their social sphere and a new religious thought. The analogy that people conceptualize cannot be separated from its secular, nor its religious references and connections.

In the case of Sugpiaq Russian Orthodoxy the analogy is based on the perception of social structures as analogous; both Sugpiaq society and the organization of the Orthodox Church are hierarchical. Social ranking was not only a characteristic of pre-contact Sugpiaq society, but it is still discernible today in Nanwalek. Similarly, the social

²⁹ The Orthodox Church does not recognize papal supremacy, only papal primacy among equals, and the theory of infallibility in Orthodoxy is different from the theory of Papal Infallibility.

classes of the Russian colonial organization still occupy a segment of Alaska Native perception of reality today. Some Native people still refer to themselves as “Aleut,” “but not Aleut like those guys out on the [Aleutian] Chain”. Rather their “Aleutness” is based in the ideology of the class system of Russian America, and re-interpreted as social status within the ranked system of Sugpiaq society. Correspondingly, the hierarchical nature of the Orthodox Church was also appreciated by the Sugpiaq mode of thought, because Sugpiaq people have already had an elaborate notion of social disparity. At the same time, Sugpiaq social classes were not rigid, and social mobility was, and still is, a part of life. Social status is not exclusively understood as strictly achieved or ascribed, rather as a balance of the two, an ongoing interpretation of the momentary social relations. Russian Orthodoxy is not only a hierarchical institution, but it is also a source of spirituality, and the two aspects cannot be fully separated from one another. For this reason, there is mobility in church hierarchy as well, which allows, and even encourages, the incorporation of local laity into the hierarchical system. Since the establishment of the first Orthodox Church in Russian America, inclusion and advancement in church hierarchy was open for all Orthodox Christians regardless of their ethnic origins. This important aspect of Russian Orthodoxy was apparent for Sugpiaq people, but they still processed and re-interpreted it through their own intellectual and cultural framework. The conceptualization of their own understanding of social status and the hierarchy of the Orthodox Church as analogous, opened the door for finding further points of comprehension between their own and the Church’s ideas regarding the numinous.

Making sense of the world is not an isolated human activity. It is not limited to only particular spheres, elements, phenomena or objects. The process that is used to create conceptual analogies can be generated both within and outside of a group. Yet, it is the most effective and longest lasting in cases when it is built on and governed by local epistemological and ontological principles, therefore, first and foremost, makes sense to the local people who then decide to utilize or to discard it. Consequently, the principles involved in the process of conversion, especially that of cultural selection, also play very significant roles in the processes of religious syncretism and its integration into the broader cultural context. It is impossible to adopt a world religion in its entirety; there is a need for choosing certain elements that are acceptable both from the local and from the missionary perspective (Fisher 1985: 153). I argue that these key elements are not

limited to religious, spiritual and theological understandings, but are highly affected by social frameworks and their interpretations during the conversation that is conversion. In fact, a large portion of what is deemed acceptable, useful, and later even indispensable, for local “consumption” is based on ideas that are not necessarily and not exclusively regarded as religious.

For these reasons I regard conceptual analogies as constituents of the conversion process, without which a foreign religion cannot have a long-term effect on the local cultural environment. While the elements, and consequently the outcome, of religious syncretism constantly changes, the conceptual analogy that facilitated the acceptance of particular foreign religious ideas in the first place is continuous, as long as it remains meaningful for people. It is a flexible link between two modes of thought that people perceive within their own realities. From the outside it seems arbitrary, because the meaning attached to the analogy rests within the local intellectual framework. Yet, it can also be dissolved in situations where it no longer makes sense to the people within the culture, and re-created on the basis of a new analogy, with the current, or perhaps a new religious tradition, depending on people’s momentary needs and wants.

The particular elements of the analogy are different in every single case and situation; however the analogy is the reason why people are able to adopt most of the core ideas of a world religion and transform it to fit their own particular circumstances. Using syncretism, that is an inherent aspect of religion, to cope with rapid changes in their social environment, by finding conceptual analogies between two different, in some cases seemingly contradictory, concepts creates an entire system that goes beyond religious thought and influences every aspect of social and cultural life.

1.4. Overview of Chapters

My focus in this dissertation is predominantly on contemporary Sugpiaq Russian Orthodoxy, which is formulated by the close correlations between missionization and religious syncretism, as well as by culture specific conceptual analogies created through the process of religious synthesis. In this chapter, I described the various factors, both historic and contemporary, which are usually considered essential when discussing Russian Orthodoxy in the Alaskan context, and particularly in connection with Alaska

Native communities (Black 1981, 1992, 2004, Dauenhauer 1997, Kan 1983, 1996, 1999, Mousalimas 1995, 2003, Oleksa 1987, 1993, Znamenski 1996, 1999, 2003). I also outlined the theoretical considerations that contributed to my understanding of religious syncretism as well as the need to introduce the notion of conceptual analogy in delineating the connections between Russian Orthodoxy and contemporary Sugpiaq life.

It would be impossible to understand religious syncretism and the analogies Sugpiaq people perceived between Orthodoxy and their own culture without taking a close look at everyday life in Nanwalek today. As conceptual analogies are continuous, and religious syncretism is an ongoing process, current practices and traditions provide insight into the link between Sugpiaq people and their Orthodox religion just as much as historic events and factors. For this reason, in chapter two I briefly review the history of the Lower-Kenai Sugpiat, including their role and involvement in the Russian colonial period of Alaska and the historical factors that shaped the life of Nanwalek as a Sugpiaq village within the United States.

In chapter three I focus on contemporary life in Nanwalek, on the lived experience inhabitants of the village share on a daily basis, which contributes significantly to understanding the avenues of integration between Church and community. Through discussing the concepts of kinship, readiness, sharing, coping with the unexpected and current Russian Orthodox practice, I provide a general description of specific aspects of life that most people living in Nanwalek experience, grew up with, personally apply and re-interpret, operate in, and pass on for subsequent generations. These idiosyncrasies of living in Nanwalek, in part, define its residents as Sugpiaq. People develop and acquire underlying notions of how to exist in their social and cultural milieu, which also become a part of their conception on the notion of “Sugpiaqness,” including Russian Orthodoxy. By examining the Christmas festal cycle in Nanwalek, I demonstrate the embeddedness of Orthodox religious conceptualizations in Sugpiaq cultural worldview in sacred time, followed by a comparison between the secular and religious understandings of questions of authority and power-relations in the village. Capturing the meaning and manifestations of “Sugpiaqness” is what I focus on in chapter three. Without understanding what it is that people do in their everyday lives – the way they live, the way they organize themselves and their perceptions of their surroundings,

react to events, and interpret their meanings – it is impossible to comprehend the role of Russian Orthodoxy in the life of the village.

One of the most important constituents of Sugpiaq identity is Russian Orthodoxy, understood not simply as a spiritual ideology, but as a cultural factor influencing social behaviour and the practical life of the village. For this reason in chapter four, I am outlining Sugpiaq ideas on social organization, social life, and social ranking, which I believe to be fundamental concepts in the articulation of contemporary Sugpiaq Russian Orthodoxy. By focusing on Sugpiaq etiquette, and exploring the Sugpiaq intellectual framework, I provide insight into the local conceptualization of social life. The social networks that pervade all aspects of the Sugpiaq lived experience are not merely the major organizing factors for social interactions but they also extend to comprise the religious realms of the community.

The system of Sugpiaq Russian Orthodoxy is the focus of chapter five. In this chapter I unfold, with the help of the notion of conceptual analogy, how Russian traditions and Russian Orthodoxy were, and still are, mediated through Sugpiaq cultural logic, perception of reality and ontological understanding to create and re-create a culturally specific religious identity. To better understand the process of internalization I explore the nature and meaning of charisma in Sugpiaq society and within Russian Orthodoxy, as well as the hierarchical structure of Russian Orthodoxy in relation to achieved and ascribed social status in Nanwalek. I conclude chapter five by analyzing the particularities of this process in order to shed light on the dynamics and methods involved in the conceptualization of an analogy.

Finally, in chapter six, I explore how conceptual analogies can contribute to the general study of identity formation and the correlations between religious and cultural identities, the transformation of religious meaning to that of cultural significance, and the cultural dynamics that govern the selection and maintenance of religious affiliations.

2. Sugpiaq Past

“Histories are [...] interpretive and subjective because they are based on the experiences, attitudes, and understandings of the historians themselves and what somebody in the past thought was important enough to record” (Partnow 2001: 6).

Because I do not actually know what it was like to be a Sugpiaq at any point in the past five hundred years, in this chapter, I am providing a collection of pieces of information and arrange them in a way that helps to create an understanding of the past of those Sugpiaq currently living in Nanwalek. In this context, my answer to Leach’s enduring question, “In whose interest is it that the past should be presented to us in this way?” (Leach 1990: 229) is twofold. First of all, my aim is to provide background information on the events that helped formulate the current Sugpiaq cultural experience, predominantly focusing on the pre-contact, Russian colonial, and early American era of Sugpiaq past. Secondly, I am presenting this background information in a manner that incorporates the local interpretation as it is remembered in Nanwalek, the regional events shaping the history of Russian America and Alaska, and the global connections to the politics of various nation-states.

For these reasons, I chose to arrange information about Sugpiaq past not in a strict chronological order, but rather based on a schema of nomenclature. Names are powerful mediums in communicating a message about the historical context and the actors who are participating in them. Moreover, looking at Sugpiaq history in general, and the cultural past of the people living in and around the Lower Kenai villages in particular, through the various names that were used to identify them, a certain pattern emerges. This pattern or schema (Ortner 1990: 90-91), without which it would have been impossible to grasp the Sugpiaq agency within the historical account, also provides some insight into both the larger historical context and the lived cultural experience. As these two concepts can be very different from the vantage points of those living through a specific time period and their descendents to whom it is passed down, in the last subchapter, I focus on providing a brief ethnohistorical account of Nanwalek’s past.

2.1. What is in a Name?

Aleut, Alutiiq, Sugpiaq, Russian, Pacific Eskimo, Unegkurmiut and Chugach Eskimo are all different names that have been used in the past to identify the group of Native people living on the Lower Kenai Peninsula. While most of these denominators are partially based on particular characteristics of the population in question, they also carry a specific social-political agenda that is embedded in the name itself. Therefore the various names, created within or outside of the group, consequently reflect a wide range of perceptions, not only allowing a comprehensive insight into the relationships between Sugpiat Alutiit and other groups of people, but also amongst the individual villages, groups, and communities of the cultural area. Furthermore, by exploring the origins of these names and analyzing the different implications that are closely associated with them, it becomes possible to understand the variety of elements involved in phrasing the questions of identity in this region.

The Sugpiat of Nanwalek are closely related to other Native peoples of Alaska. In fact, the villages of Kodiak Island, Alaska Peninsula, Kenai Peninsula, and Prince William Sound are all regarded as one cultural area, based on historical, ethnic, and linguistic attributes³⁰ (De Laguna 1975: 218). Today it is customary, in academic and in popular literatures alike, to refer to this cultural region as Alutiiq. In this dissertation I chose to diverge from this practice and use the term Sugpiaq Alutiiq when describing the villages and the people of the whole cultural area. This alternate usage is justified by people's preferences on the Lower Kenai Peninsula. Here people prefer to refer to themselves as Sugpiaq, and decisively decline identification with the term Alutiiq, although sometimes refer to themselves as Aleut. While it is tempting and could be considered legitimate, to only use the ethnonym Sugpiaq, meaning "real person," in describing the Native population of the region, I felt it would be just as incomplete as the current usage. In the villages of Kodiak Island and the Alaska Peninsula people do

³⁰ The Alutiiq language has two main dialects, the Koniag and the Chugach. While Koniag is spoken on the Alaska Peninsula and Kodiak Island, Chugach is used on the Prince William Sound and the lower Kenai Peninsula. The dialect spoken on the Kenai Peninsula is actually considered a sub-dialect, since the Chugach dialect has been influenced by the Koniag through time to the extent that it has formed its own version of Alutiiq, representing a transition between the two main dialects (Leer 2001: 31).

ascribe to the self-designation that is today called Alutiiq, which I believe to be slightly different from the term Sugpiaq. Therefore, in this chapter I examine the circumstances that influenced the formulation of each of these names and historic and contemporary interactions between these nomenclatures. For this reason, I use these names in the following manner: Sugpiaq Alutiiq for all four regions, Sugpiaq, for the Lower Kenai area, Alutiiq for Kodiak Island and the Alaska Peninsula, and sometimes Chugach Alutiiq for the Prince William Sound.

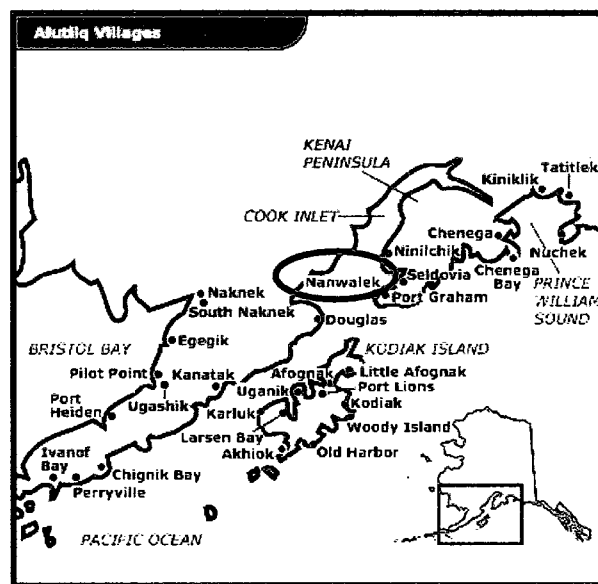


Figure 2. Map of Alutiiq villages in 2001.
Adapted from: <http://www.mnh.si.edu/lookingbothways/>

2.1.1. Unegkurmiut

Prior to Russian colonization, Sugpiaq Alutiiq people most likely had local names for themselves to differentiate villages and settlements from each other. Most of these names are not used anymore; yet, occasionally they still appear in various denominatory contexts, especially when used between Sugpiaq Alutiiq groups (Pullar 1992: 184-185). As a general division, three major groups of Sugpiat Alutiit can be

distinguished: the *Chugachmiut* on the Prince William Sound, the *Unegkurmiut* on the Lower-Kenai Peninsula, and the *Qikertarmiut* on Kodiak Island (Pullar 1994: 30). The latter group is also called *Koniagmiut*, and basically associated not only with the Kodiak area proper, but also with the people of the Alaska Peninsula. In the case of the Chugach region, there is more information available regarding particular names, than in the other Sugpiaq Alutiiq regions. Eight local names and corresponding geographical territories are recorded for the Prince William Sound (Birket-Smith 1953: 20-21, De Laguna 1956: 11)

³¹. In these cases the names did not have fixed boundaries, but referred to a main settlement, or pointed out some distinct characteristics of the location.³² In other cases however, certain groups might have been called by a particular name by their neighbors, thus the names often reflect geographical location or direction, not strictly from a local point of view. Although it is probably the least known and used, *Unegkurmiut* is a name that refers to the specific location of the Lower-Kenai Peninsula villages, meaning “people out there,” and it is a description given from a point of view of someone who is standing on the shores of Prince William Sound (Davis 1984: 199).

The Native people of Prince William Sound are largely considered to be the closest relations of the Kenai area Sugpiaq based on a linguistic relation that assigns both languages as the sub-dialects of Chugach Sugtestun; also, archeological evidence shows frequent exchanges and high mobility between the two areas that were, prior to Russian colonization, connected by a sequence of villages along the outer coast of the Kenai Peninsula. While the currently uninhabited villages were varying in size and population, they most likely were not occupied year-around, and they undoubtedly belonged to the larger cultural area that is today referred to as Alutiiq – from here on Sugpiaq Alutiiq.

The physical separation and dividedness of the villages and people in this cultural area might lead to the questioning of their relatedness. With the help of archeological data however, it becomes clear that despite the numerous population movements and migrations that occurred in the Gulf of Alaska, the Native people

³¹ The eight names are: Palugvirmiut – Palugvik, Nutyirmiut – Nuchek, Alukarmiut – Sheep Bay, Atyarmiut – Gravina Bay, Kangirtlurmiut – Kiniklik, Tyanirmiut – Chenega, Shuqlurmiut – Montague Island (De Laguna 1956: 11, Birket-Smith 1953: 20-21).

³² As an example, Tyanirmiut named after Tyanirag meaning “woodless place” (Birket-Smith 1953: 21). However, Tyanirag, currently Chenega, means “beside of it” referring to being on the side of the mountain (Interview with Sperry Ash 2004).

inhabiting Kodiak Island, the Alaska Peninsula, parts of the Kenai Peninsula and Prince William Sound are indeed related to one another both culturally and genetically; moreover, often times they can evoke direct kinship ties as well.

According to Aron Crowell and Sonja Lührmann, the earliest records indicate that the Sugpiaq Alutiiq region was occupied by the population crossing over from Siberia after the last Pleistocene (2001: 26), and the cultural area, referred to as Paleoarctic, was mostly characterized by inland life relying on land-based subsistence. Furthermore, while the earliest settlement on the Kenai Peninsula dates to Ocean Bay II tradition (approximately 2500 B.C.), it is believed that Kachemak Bay could have been occupied about 10,000 years ago (Steffian 2001: 106-7). All together, the various areas within the Sugpiaq Alutiiq region have different cultural features, and the Chugach area (including both the Kenai Peninsula and Prince William Sound), has probably “lost” abandoned villages and village sites to geological erosion. Therefore, while the Ocean Bay I tradition, known from sites on Kodiak Island and the Alaska Peninsula, is missing in the Chugach area; Ocean Bay II is clearly present and exhibits signs of adaptation to coastal living (Steffian 2001: 110). Moreover, the Middle Era of Sugpiaq Alutiiq pre-history named after the Kachemak Bay sites indicates an enlarged population with increase in the size and numbers of settlements, which resulted in changes of settlement patterns, socio-economic life with intensified trade and exchange, and technological development in subsistence practices (Steffian 2001: 115). The Kachemak tradition also shows a true coastal adaptation, which is partially responsible for the population growth that facilitated the extensive contact among the Native people of the North Pacific Rim.

The most interesting transformation of the cultures occupying the Sugpiaq Alutiiq region has transpired in the Late Pre-contact Era, roughly between A.D. 1100 and 1760 (Steffian 2001: 120). There are different theories (Clark 1988, Dumond 1987, Knecht 1995) regarding the reasons, and the actual course of the events, that resulted in the appearance of a large Yup’ik-speaking population in the Sugpiaq Alutiiq areas, yet the legacy of the population influx had lasting affects in the region. The close linguistic relation between Sugtestun, language of the Sugpiaq, and Yup’ik suggest that the incoming language overpowered the old one, while the modifications and cultural differences between Yup’ik and Sugpiaq Alutiiq traditions prove the blending of the new and old populations (Crowell and Lührmann 2001: 29).

The era directly preceding the time of the Russian contact is characterized by expansive wars between the villages of the region, by the accumulation of wealth that provided the basis of hierarchically ranked societies and specialized social roles and occupations (Saltonstall and Steffian 2005, Steffian 2001). Although the social organization of the villages in the North Pacific region was very different from the mostly egalitarian arrangements of the Eskimo speaking population of Northwestern Alaska, the linguistic connection impelled further cultural exchange. While the population growth continued in most parts of the Sugpiaq Alutiiq region, the Kachemak tradition was overtaken by the influx of a Dena'ina population, who migrated south along the inner coasts of the Kenai Peninsula. According to Steffian, this phenomenon was accompanied by the disappearance of Sugpiaq Alutiiq settlements from the Kenai Coast, and the increase of the population on Northern Kodiak (2001: 121-22). The reasons for this population movement are not clear, although there seem to be no signs of a violent clash between the Sugpiat Alutiit and the Dena'ina (De Laguna 1956). This suggests that the latter overtook the villages after the former group had abandoned them. Also, it is important to recognize that the Sugpiaq Alutiiq presence did not completely disappear from the Kenai Coast; rather, it had diminished in size and numbers, which probably lead to the decrease in contact with the other Sugpiaq Alutiiq regions in the following time periods.

All together, the population currently referred to as Sugpiaq Alutiiq has been influenced by many Native cultures of Alaska, due to migration, wars and trade, and it is safe to assume that it shares traditions with their Unangan Aleut, Tlingit, Eyak, Yup'ik, Dena'ina and Ahtna neighbors. These interactions are partially due to the geographical location of the region; the Gulf of Alaska being not only a central, but also a high traffic area, where migration routes repeatedly crossed and joined during the past 10,000 years. At the same time, the Sugpiaq Alutiiq population "seems to have been a product of its own independent development in the Gulf of Alaska," therefore some Sugpiat Alutiit are quite opposed to the classification of their culture as purely Eskimo (Crowell and Lührmann 2001: 29). To understand the underlying reasons of this statement, it is necessary to further examine the nomenclature used in connection of this specific cultural group.

2.1.2. Pacific Eskimo

When some Sugpiaq Alutiiq people refuse their identification as “Eskimo,” they do not necessarily deny an otherwise linguistically and anthropologically proven connection to other Eskimo peoples; rather, they express their indignance toward a term created by academics, mainly for taxonomical use, based on Western principles, with no regard to local sentiments.³³ Consequently, “Pacific Eskimo” was created and used by a scientific idea of classification, most likely, emerging from a linguistic approach. In the first half of the 20th century, the Native people of the Sugpiaq Alutiiq regions were barely known, and their origin was a complete anthropological mystery. A letter, written by Fredericka Martin, an editor of Aleut Dictionary, in 1947 to Kenneth Cohen, the schoolmaster for the Sugpiaq village of Port Graham, provides a glimpse into the extent of confusion, lack of information, and ignorance regarding the Sugpiaq Alutiiq. Based on the correspondence between Cohen and Martin, the latter asking for the assistance of the former in collecting local linguistic sample, Martin concludes that, the Native language of Port Graham “...is not related with Kodiak – which probably means it is not Eskimoid but Indian in derivation” (Kenneth S. Cohen collection, Box 9, Folder 174). In the same letter Martin also reflects on her incorrect understanding of the Port Graham “non-Aleuts” *not* belonging to the Russian Orthodox Church based on Cohen’s reference to people by their “native” name versus their “Church name.” Although it was very common to misplace Native cultures and create false taxonomies based on half-information, my goal in providing this particular excerpt was not to downplay Fredericka Martin’s achievements, rather to highlight the gravity of the situation caused by the lack of academic data.

One of the biggest challenges of Alaska during the first half of the 20th century was to create a system that enabled the academic study and general understanding of the indigenous peoples living in the territory. Based on previous practice and contemporary approach, a rigid taxonomical system was brought to life, which in many cases yielded

³³ Accordingly, the term Chugach Eskimo was also widely used in academia, after its introduction by Frederica De Laguna and Kaj Birket-Smith (Birket-Smith 1953, De Laguna 1956), without much contestation from the Sugpiaq Alutiiq of Prince William Sound and Kenai Peninsula. At the same time, it is not a term that people would use as a self-identification, and today it is considered quite dated.

false results and directly contributed to today's perplexities. Oftentimes people were classified based on linguistic characteristics, and as the previous passage shows, the linguistic study of Native Alaskan languages was not yet comprehensive enough at the time to perceive the subtle differences. It is also interesting to see that using linguistics as the only legitimate scientific way to separate all Native people into neat groups with clear-cut boundaries was actually an approach that remained in practice beyond its theoretical relevance. Unfortunately, it still prevails in certain circles studying Native cultures of Alaska, and it is exactly this practice that some Sugpiat Alutiiq oppose when rejecting the denomination as Pacific Eskimo. True, the Alutiiq region is located in the Pacific Gulf, and true, Sugtestun does belong to the Eskimo language family; but these two features are arbitrarily chosen based on an etic scientific approach, and really does not reflect all the other important elements that Sugpiaq Alutiiq people would chose for circumscribing, or even classifying, their own identity.³⁴ Quite a few Sugpiaq Alutiiq people contemplate the question: If Yup'ik people can use the ethnonym Yup'ik, meaning "real person," why should not the Sugpiaq Alutiiq be allowed to do the same? Furthermore, external naming (Jenkins 1997: 219) is always created on the basis of a specific viewpoint, often with the involvement of unequal power relations; therefore, it inherently encapsulates a complete history on the interactions between the naming and the named. The Sugpiaq Alutiiq resent the name Pacific Eskimo, or even worse, Pacific Yup'ik, because of their desire to be viewed as a legitimately independent Alaskan Native culture, and not as a subdivision of other indigenous cultural groups.

Interestingly, Heinrich Johan Holmberg, a Finish mining specialist, actually made their case in the early 1850's, by providing his own classificatory system, which reflects the high level of subjectivity involved in any kind of taxonomical endeavor. Holmberg, after traveling in Russian America, assembled a list of the "known tribes of Alaska," in which he had listed all Yup'ik people and even some Inupiat, as Koniags, meaning the Alutiiq people of Kodiak Island (Holmberg 1985: 6-7). Naturally, the latter example not only shows the extent of Holmberg's travel in Alaska, which indeed was mostly conducted on Kodiak Island and the Kenai Peninsula, but also the serious

³⁴ In fact, sometimes Sugpiaq Alutiiq is referred to as Pacific Yup'ik - highly disapproved in Sugpiaq Alutiiq circles - in acknowledgment to the fact that Sugtestun is one of the five Yup'ik languages in Alaska and Siberia (Clark 1984: 185).

problems created by the adoption of identifying names into academia without applying close scrutiny to the various implications and view points associated with the particular term.

Incidentally, Holmberg was also the first person to make a note of the term Alutiiq, sometimes also spelled *Aluutiq*, as he reported that the Native people of Kodiak Island especially "...the younger generation have started to call themselves Aleuts (in their dialect, Aluitik) [and] only the aged still report that in their days of freedom and independence [from the Russians] they called themselves Koniags" (Holmberg 1985: 35). Although Alutiiq is one of the most acceptable and preferred terms in some of the Sugpiaq Alutiiq regions, its origin, and consequently its connotations, are deeply embedded in the Russian colonial history of Alaska.

2.1.3. Aleut, Russian, Creole

When the Russians arrived in "Alaska" in 1741, they first met Unangan people living on the islands of the Aleutian Chain and called them Aleut. After reaching Kodiak Island in the second half of the 18th century they met Koniag people living on the coast and also called them Aleut. The logic behind the Russians extension of an already used name to these newly encountered people was probably influenced by the resemblance in the two groups' cultural practices and physical appearance. As the Russians met more and more of the Native population in the region, they referred to a lot of them as Aleut, regardless of the fact that they were well aware of the linguistic difference between these various peoples. As a comparison to the academic approach, the constant Russian struggle to find adequate and oftentimes multiple interpreters in order to communicate with all these different kinds of "Aleuts" also shows that their main concern did not lie in the taxonomical identification. Rather, the Russian colonial practice of calling all Native peoples Aleut, thus creating a social and not an ethnic class, was due to a combination of social and economic factors.

The structure of Russian society in the 18th and 19th century was still quite feudal-hierarchical despite the influx of ideas from European Enlightenment in the 18th century. The various social classes were still evidently discernable, but there was a possibility for

social movement between (Riasanovsky 1969: 387). The bourgeoisie still constituted only a slim percentage of the population compared to the enormous number of serfs, yet the idea of entrepreneurship, which took off during the reign of Peter the Great, had some lasting results. One of these influences was the various trading companies entering Russian America with the aim of acquiring fur from the Natives and selling them on the Chinese fur market at Kiakhta.³⁵

At the same time, for the Russian Orthodox Church, the Synodical period is usually regarded as a decline of Orthodoxy, although, the middle of the nineteenth century the Church had witnessed a spiritual revival.³⁶ This revival was especially visible through the conscious development of Russian theology, the direct opposition to Western values, and the renewal in the missionary work of the Church. Translation of the liturgical books to different languages of the Russian Empire, training of missionaries, and later, the training of Native clergy were all part of the missionary movement that played a key role in the conversion of the Native people of Russian America to the Orthodox faith. St. Innocent (Ioann Veniaminov), St. Iakov of Alaska, St. Herman, and St. Peter the Aleut were all part of this missionary revival, although each of them had very different mentalities, and emphasized different aspects of the Orthodox faith through their lives and legacies. In the meantime, these differences did not prevent them from carrying out the Church's agenda towards the "Americans" as the Russians referred to the Natives of Russian America, which on the one hand helped facilitating Russia's colonial expansion, while on the other, protected Native Alaskans from the Russian American Company's abuse of power.

It is safe to say that colonies not only take on unmistakable characteristics of their colonizers, but also modify and employ these foreign attributes in such a way that for those in the "father nation" the modified and locally internalized elements no longer carry the exact same meaning. To some extent, this was the case in Alaska as well;

³⁵ It is important to note that the Russian American Company was granted privileges regarding the American colony, but it was not a private company, "rather [...] an important auxiliary of the Imperial Russian government" (Dmytryshyn 1989: xxxiv).

³⁶ The Synodical period in the history of the Russian Orthodox Church dates back to the reign of Peter the Great, who decided that restructuring the Church was necessary. He replaced the position of the Patriarch of Moscow with a new organization termed the "Holy Synod." The Synod consisted of twelve members appointed by the Tsar from the members of married clergy, monks and bishops (Ware 1997: 114).

however, it soon became clear both for the Russian American Company (RAC) and the Russian government that this particular colony in America would have to be different from the Western nations' overseas colonies.³⁷ Due to the internal stratification of nineteenth century Russia, it was not possible to "export" a large number of willing settlers to the new colony, as it would have caused shortages in serf labor with consequent economic losses (Okun 1951: 172). Therefore, RAC workers were initially allowed to sign on for a seven year contract only, although the Company often failed to transport them back to the Fatherland after their term was over. As a result, a lot of men settled down in Alaska, took a local wife, and raised their new families with the implicit consent of the RAC. Meanwhile, even with the permanent influx of these Russian *promyshlenniki* (fur traders) the Russian presence in the colony did not rise above 900 people at a time (Personal Communication with Dr. Lydia Black 2001, Fedorova 1975: 8). Therefore, it soon became clear for the Russians that keeping and maintaining the American colony would largely depend on the nature of their relationships with the locals. Consequently, the fur traders living on the colony "by default," became an important factor in the life of the RAC by actively participating in the creation of a new social class, the Creoles.

The term Creole is often used to describe a population with Native and non-Native parentage. In the case of Alaska, this situation is often assumed to be a Russian father and a Native mother, with the children automatically being categorized into a new ethnic class. While this interpretation was probably correct at the beginning of the Russian colonial period, soon the term Creole took on a different meaning, and was no longer regarded as an ethnic, but rather as a social marker (Black 1980). The children born to mixed Russian and Native marriages were brought up to be members of the Russian Orthodox Church, and they were educated in a school run by the RAC in addition to receiving teachings about their mother's Native culture, speaking both Russian and their Native languages, and essentially in the spirit of loyalty towards the Russian crown and the RAC. Often, these children were sent to the Fatherland, at the expense of their godparents, parents, or the RAC, to receive higher education as navigators, map-makers, military personnel, and priests. Upon their return to Alaska,

³⁷ Meaning that the colonial presence would not be large in numbers, therefore local involvement would be crucial in maintaining the colony, even in the highest offices and positions.

sometimes with their Russian bride, they automatically became employees of the Russian American Company³⁸.

By the mid-1800's, the term Creole did not, and could not, refer to the children of mixed marriages; rather, it described a person who spoke Russian and a Native Alaskan language, was Russian Orthodox, had received elementary education, and was an employee of the Company. The shift in the social status and class categories also meant an increased social mobility and permeability, where Creoles came to hold important key positions in the Russian American Company with the possibility of advancement to the lower noble classes (Black 1980: xxv)³⁹. Furthermore, after finishing the active service, Creoles had the option to become colonial citizens, which meant that they were allowed to legally settle down in the colony for the rest of their lives (Black 2004: 217). Similarly, the term Aleut, did not refer to a specific ethnic group, but rather to a group of Alaska Natives who were in contact with the Russian American Company and were members of the Church. In fact, quite a few Aleuts, despite not having any Russian descent, became Creoles by seeking employment with the RAC and completing a training or education through them.

For these reasons the Russian and Native Alaskan interaction was not a replacement of one culture with another and it was not simply cultural blending either. The RAC had clear expectations towards Creoles: to speak Russian and a Native language, to be Russian Orthodox, and to work for the Company. Beyond these stipulations however, other aspects of life were negotiated on a day-to-day basis. The rules governing social behavior in Native Alaskan communities during the Russian colonial era undoubtedly changed to an extent, as a result of the prolonged cross-cultural interaction; yet it was not an automatic change. It was a change initiated and realized by people living through the particular historical period based on their perception of Russians and their colonial institutions. The transformation of Creoles from an ethnic to a social class simultaneously highlights the hierarchical nature of the colonial system, as well as its flexibility that placed social advancement within reach of Native Alaskans.

³⁸ In many cases "Russians" working for the RAC were not actually ethnically Russian, rather Greek Ukrainian, Siberian or Scandinavian.

³⁹ Creoles " ... enjoyed exemption from taxations and obligatory state services, including military service, had a right to education at company expenses, and opportunity for social mobility and freedom of choice not open to Russians of lower ranks" (Black 2004: 218).

Accordingly, considering power and shifting power relations in cross-cultural religious discourse is indispensable in understanding local Native experience (Bowen 2002, Burch 1994, Kan 1999, Kirsch 2004, Murray 1999, Shaw and Stewart 1994, Trott 1997). The process of conversion has been linked to individual desires to gain more power by associating with the new religious entity, and developing a close relationship with a particular church in order to enhance personal prestige and standing (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991, Hefner 1993a, 1993b, Jolles 2002, Morrison 1990). In the case of the Aleuts of Russian America, including the Sugpiat Alutiit, the internalization of Russian Orthodoxy was probably a continuous event, where children raised in the paternal-Orthodox religion, grew into the new, colonial, social order realizing, exercising, and using the powers and prestige that originated from their Aleut or Creole status. While these specific social classes of the colony were major beneficiaries of the RAC's social policies regulated by the Russian imperial government - providing education, medical service, pensions, and other forms of social care, often through the Russian Orthodox Church - their attachment to the colonial system was emotional as well. People accepted the designation "Aleut" not on a conditional, but on a permanent basis. Natives of various ethnic origins all took on the name Aleut and assumed the consequent identification with the term because it carried a specific meaning for them, which, undoubtedly, was embedded in the Russian colonial system. At the same time, being an Aleut also invested these people with special rights and offered further possibilities for advancement through the social structure of the colony. Undeniably, the peak of the social system was occupied by Russians, who were regarded with admiration, yet were not out of reach of the ordinary people; after all, many had Russian fathers, mothers, husbands, wives, godparents or, in the later generation, grandparents. It is important to keep in mind that the number of Russians on the colony was extremely low; therefore individual personalities, characteristics and habits became very decisive in the nature of the contact experience of various Native groups and communities. Not every single Russian was kind and pleasant, in fact the available archival material discloses many of the social problems that were caused by company employees (Khlebnikov 1994, Pierce 1984, Tikhmenev 1979); moreover, not all the priests and missionaries were exceptional and good-natured. Yet, the ones who were extraordinary both in clergy and in bureaucracy had influenced many lives and all of them were directly involved with the locals for a lengthy period of

time. Therefore people developed a yearning and appreciation for everything that was Russian. Even today, most Native Orthodox homes have icons; oftentimes people might have a cherished piece of Russian style furniture, a piece of china or an Orthodox devotional item that was passed down in the family. Similarly, communities with older churches frequently have antique prayer books and an icon that was brought over from Russia during colonial times. In this sense, something being Russian made is equated with being unique, special, and ultimately superior. Something “done in the Russian way” is considered the definitive authority in questions of appropriateness or correctness, while something or someone being declared Russian is often a decisive argument in establishing authenticity.

When people in villages still identify themselves as Aleut, or Russian, they are probably reflecting on the historical implications of these terms that have been passed down to them through several generations. In the Sugpiaq Alutiiq regions, it is mostly the older generation who cite Aleut and Russian as their ethnic identity, and for them the connection is not only based on descent, but also on the meanings these terms held for their ancestors. An elder of Nanwalek once told me that she was “part Russian, part Aleut and part Spanish,” with the latter referring to her ancestors living in the most Southern Russian settlement, Fort Ross, in California. Her self-identification as such was not only factually correct, but also expressed ideas that were major influences throughout the history and ethnohistory of the Lower Kenai Sugpiaq.

2.1.4. Sugpiaq and Alutiiq

Realizing the close connection between the term Aleut and colonial Russian America, makes it possible to discern the usage of the newly emerged name and identity marker: Alutiiq. As previously mentioned, the name Alutiiq was already in use on Kodiak Island even during the colonial period (Holmberg 1985), although the meaning of the term at that specific time was very different from the current meaning and implications. Just by looking at the two terms, it is possible to suggest that there is a clear relationship between the words ‘Aleut’ and ‘Alutiiq’. Indeed, the Native people of Kodiak Island, who, as many other Native people of the Russian American colony, adopted the name Aleut into their vocabulary and identity, and started to use the word

Aleut in their own language. In Sugtestun, the language of the Sugpiaq Alutiiq, nouns often end with a suffix, in this singular case “iq,” thus the pronunciation of Aleut in Sugtestun became Alutiiq (Leer 2001:31).⁴⁰ During the colonial time, when people declared their “Aleutness” in their own language, they used the word “Alutiiq”.

The current usage of the word Alutiiq greatly differs from the previous one. First of all, in the popular, and to a certain extent in the academic literature as well, it came to describe a specific cultural group, and ‘Alutiiq’ is in the process of replacing most of the previously used, and now regarded as dated, nomenclature. Today, when the term Alutiiq is used in academia, it refers to the Native inhabitants of Kodiak Island, Alaska Peninsula, Prince William Sound, and Lower Kenai Peninsula. In contrast, the Native usage is very different; it is predominantly the inhabitants or descendants of Kodiak Island Natives who actually use the word Alutiiq to describe their own identity, while the Lower-Kenai and Prince William Sound people usually use the ethnonym Sugpiaq.⁴¹

The term “Sugpiaq” was probably used as a general ethnonym meaning the “real person” or in plural Sugpiat “the real people,” while the language was called Sugtestun meaning “speaking like a person” (Clark 1984: 196, Leer 2001: 31). As previously discussed, people living in the various villages or regions have most likely had specific names based on their geographical origin that they used with other groups within the same cultural area.⁴² Therefore, it is possible that the self-defining term Sugpiat was actually a term used in relation to outsiders (Native or non-Native alike), as it probably was a general self-identification.

The dualism of the nomenclature shows individual preference of identification with various notions articulated by these names. Although it is possible to develop a sense of belonging to two different discrete groups or to alternate between various aspects of one’s heritage when emphasizing questions of identity depending on momentary circumstances (Barth 1969), in this case the situation is quite different. Since

⁴⁰ In plural Alutiit.

⁴¹ Patricia Partnow’s systematic usage of the term Alutiiq in connection with the Alaska Peninsula villages and people suggest that it is the preferred identifying term in that region (Partnow 2001: 17).

⁴² These names are formulated with the addition of –miut to the stem of the word (Koniagmiut, Nanwalegmiut, Paluwigmiut, etc.)

it is essentially one group of people that the name Alutiiq refers to, including those within the cultural group who do not share the preference for this specific name and identity reference, it is usually a clear cut decision that people make in regards of the terms Alutiiq and Sugpiaq. In general, it is safe to assume that the closer certain terms seem to be to each other in meaning and implications for the outside viewer, the more unanimous people on the inside are going to be in their absolute differentiation between the two. Furthermore, they usually passionately insist that the actual diversities are so significant - which they are from their vantage point - that they must be acknowledged. While I recognize this phenomenon and seek to accommodate specific views and sentiments, I combine the terms into one singular name so as to prevent the confusion originating from these regional preferences. In this dissertation, the name Sugpiaq Alutiiq refers to the cultural area including all four regions (Kodiak Island, the Alaska Peninsula, the Lower Kenai Peninsula and Prince William Sound) while the term Alutiiq is used to describe the Alaska Peninsula and Kodiak Island. Since the term Sugpiaq enjoys an overwhelming preference over any other nomenclature in the village of Nanwalek, and as far as I know in the villages of the Chugach region, it will always be used in connection with these specific areas.

In order to understand the importance of these two distinct terms it is necessary to follow their formulation from a historical perspective. As we saw, the term Aleut had lost its previous meaning during the early American period of Alaska, and for many decades, people's responses when citing and claiming the acknowledgment of an Aleut identity was repeatedly questioned. The problem culminated to a point where academics claimed to "know better" and assumed authority over Native Alaskans. As a result, these people's Aleut identity was not only questioned and scrutinized, but also negated. Therefore, it is understandable that the name Aleut slowly wore out of use, that is, as an identifier for the Sugpiaq Alutiiq, and various other terms started to gain popularity. Although there is no certain reference and proof in this matter, the close association between the term 'Alutiiq' and Kodiak Island was probably influenced by its central role in the Russian colony. Three Saints Bay and Pavlovskaja Harbor were the center of the colony for decades, and Spruce Island, known for being the home of St Herman, maintained its religious importance until today. Therefore it is not a surprise that Native

people in the area held on to their “Aleutness” for a longer period of time than others anywhere else in Alaska. On the other hand, the re-interpretation of this idea through the new term Alutiiq has been quite ingenious, and was performed in a sequence that was influenced by historical events.

The name Alutiiq started to re-appear and gain ground in a wider sense in the late 1960’s and early 1970’s. After 1971, the widespread effects of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) soon started to generate a change in Sugpiaq Alutiiq identity with the revitalization of the former and the creation of the latter term. These political events “atavistically generated” (Cohen 1985: 28) some traditional forms of identification, which they applied to their modern situation, because of the stress caused by rapid changes in their cultural surroundings they turned towards their most ancient heritage. Alutiiq people started to re-claim not only certain rights, but also certain aspects of their cultural heritage, including the association with the term Aleut, which was previously contested and dropped as “incorrect” in academic use (Pullar 1992: 183).⁴³ In this sense, people ceased to refer themselves as Aleut, and started to say that they were Alutiiq, which was a new concept at the time, consequently nobody could really contest it. With the creation of the Alutiiq Museum and Archeological Repository the name really caught on and became popular and used at a variety of forums. These events caused a major turn around in the predicament of this previously contested group of people, and with support from the Museum and its advocates, the idea of a new term, Alutiiq, that is endorsed and selected by “the Natives” themselves, became widely accepted.

In contrast, Nanwalek and the Lower Kenai area had a smaller population, and was not a Russian colonial center despite its early contacts and involvement as Russian outpost. In this sense, people living on the Lower Kenai coast had more independence in terms of colonial relations, as well as in navigating amongst different expressions of identity. Migration and travel has been documented throughout the region, and local oral histories mention intermarriages, wars, raids, and alliances between communities. A large

⁴³ Additionally, this was a period of time in the history of Alaska, when the acknowledgment of Native rights and the creation of corporations had turned around the previous negative perceptions originating in BIA schooling and in the pro-reservation propaganda, resulting in the empowerment of Alaska Natives to declare and embrace their heritage.

segment of the population currently living in the Kenai Peninsula villages are in fact descendents of Kodiak Alutiit, who moved over from the island during the 19th and 20th century. It seems however, that due to the more secluded location of the Lower Kenai Coast, compared to Kodiak, the local cultural milieu was more focused on the Sugpiaq heritage than on the Aleut one. Hence, the villages of the Kenai Coast have managed to preserve their language and many aspects of their pre-contact culture in a way that is transmitted to children today as a living cultural tradition.⁴⁴ Therefore people living in the Kenai Coast prefer to use Sugpiaq as their self-designation, because the term Alutiit does not carry the same meaning for them as for the Native people of the Kodiak area.

2.2. Nanwalek – Aleksandrovskoe – English Bay – Nanwalek

Before the arrival of the Russian *promyshlenniki*, the Lower Kenai Peninsula, including both the outer and inner coasts, was populated by groups of Native people, who moved around between subsistence camps following a seasonal pattern. These temporary settlements included, in addition to Nanwalek, Koyuktolik Bay (Dogfish Bay), Port Chatam, Portlock, Ayalik, and Chrome Bay among others. While they were all previously occupied for shorter or longer periods of time in the past, as of today, only Port Graham and Nanwalek are inhabited. Additional temporary settlements and camps were also found on Elizabeth Island. Fredericka De Laguna, during her field season in the 1930's, identified six villages in this area; Port Graham 'Palu'vik' and English Bay 'Nanu'lauq' were listed as inhabited settlements, while Yalik at Nuka Bay, Ayalik Bay, and 'Nuna'tunaq at Rocky Bay were described to be abandoned. Finally, Dogfish Bay 'Kogiu'xtolik', Chrome 'To'gakvik' and Port Chatham 'Axu'layik' are described neither as occupied nor abandoned (De Laguna 1975: 15).

At the time of contact, the previously noted locations were valued by locals for different reasons, and were frequented based on a combination of factors such as subsistence activities, family relations, yearly weather patterns, personal significance and connections and cultural meaning. Because Nanwalek is located in the vicinity of a lake

⁴⁴ Nanwalek is often referred to as the most traditional village, due to its success in preserving pre-contact cultural elements and language usage (Davis 1984).

system and it has access to ocean routes and overland trails, it was most likely visited regularly by local Natives, both Sugpiat and Denaina.⁴⁵ The natural beauty and the advantageous setting of the location also captivated the Russian travelers and explorers sent out by Grigorii Shelikov⁴⁶, who stopped here on their way to the “Chugach” region.⁴⁷ After setting up a base in Three Saints Bay on Kodiak, Shelikov sent out company employees towards the Kenai Peninsula and Prince William Sound to trade and to explore the land. The party returned with hostages, but without conducting much trading. Subsequent visits took place during the winter of 1785-1786 (Shelikov 1981: 47), and by the time Shelikov set sail from Kodiak to Russia, the Aleksandrovscoe artel – a permanent work crew – was established at the mouth of the Cook Inlet, at the current location of Nanwalek (Black 2004: 107-108).⁴⁸ Fort Alexandrovsk, and consequently Aleksandrovscoe, became the first permanent Russian settlement on the Alaska mainland in 1786, and the second one for the Russian American Colony.⁴⁹ The fort was personally designed by Shelikov, and was located in the area that is currently used as the airport and landing strip. According to the Russian practice of claiming “new land” for the crown, it is highly likely that a metal plate was buried around this location, but none has been found.⁵⁰

Initially, the fort was a major trading center for the Shelikov-Golikov Company, and was supported by twenty employees under the supervision of Vassilii Malakhov (English Bay Students 1980: 11). Fort Aleksandrovsk was designed to be a base for exploration along the coast and on the Kenai Peninsula; therefore, at first, it was given high priority. For local Native people, Aleksandrovsk still was not a permanent settlement, although they probably visited the fort more regularly for trading, and might have even spent some time in the vicinity for the same reasons.

⁴⁵ The later also called “Kenaitze” by the Russians, and constituting the Athabaskan population moving down along the coast of Cook Inlet towards Seldovia.

⁴⁶ Shelikov was the owner-manager of the Shelikov-Golikov trading company, which was later re-structured as the Russian American Company.

⁴⁷ “Chugach” here meaning the Sugpiat of Prince William Sound, and the exact destination of the party Nuchek.

⁴⁸ Aleksandrovscoe *artel* is not the same as the Aleksandrovskiy Redoubt established on the Nushagak River in 1819 by Fedor Lavrentevich Kolmakov (VanStone 1988: 66).

⁴⁹ The first one being on Kodiak, at Three Saints Bay, which later was moved to Pavlovskaya Harbor (Black 2004).

⁵⁰ Baranov ordered plates to be moved around, as their locations were to be kept as top secret (Foster and Henrikson 1995).

Although the Russian influence was decisive on the Kenai Peninsula, Russians were not the first explorers making contact with local Native people. The first documented foreign contact was by Captain Cook visiting the Prince William Sound and the Kenai Peninsula on his third voyage, in 1778-1779. The expedition sailed with two ships, the *Resolution* with Cook, and the *Discovery* with Captain Clerke in command; both ships encountered and made contact with Sugpiaq people. During one of these occasions, a local Native approached the *Discovery*, and handed over a wooden box to Captain Clerke, who found a note written in Russian in it. Since neither captain spoke Russian, they were unable to read the message except for the year 1766 indicated on the paper (Cook 1993: 380-381). Thus it appears that a Russian ship had anchored in the region quite early on in the Russian colonial endeavor, although it is also possible that the box was brought to this location from somewhere else. On this voyage Cook encountered an island at the mouth of the Kenai Peninsula, just before he turned into the inlet, which he named Elisabeth Island. He also described two men approaching him on the following day and inviting him, by repeatedly pointing to the shore. While Cook did not describe them as such, given the location and their behavior, it is safe to assume that they were Sugpiat from the villages of the lower Kenai Peninsula (Cook 1993: 376).

Another English expedition en route from Hawaii to the Prince William Sound, led by Captains Portlock and Dixon, participants of Cook's previous voyages, made landfall at the mouth of the Cook Inlet in 1786, and encountered Russians and local Natives. They sailed along the coast currently occupied by the villages of Nanwalek and Port Graham, and anchored their ships somewhere in the vicinity of Cape Bede, in the hopes of bypassing the Russians and trading fur directly with the locals (C.L. 1984: 22-31). According to the description of C.L., an unidentified member of the crew,⁵¹ canoes of various sizes, some of them containing fourteen men,⁵² approached the ship and had good quality furs in large quantities to trade for blue beads and iron toes (C.L. 1984: 29). The people appeared "harmless and innocent in their manners," and were armed with bows, arrows and spears, dressed in skin clothing (C.L. 1984: 32). Interestingly, C.L. also

⁵¹ It is believed that C.L. was the ship surgeon and it is highly likely that he was a young Scot by the name of William Colin Lauder (C.L. 1984: Introduction).

⁵² Based on their description the large boats were *angyat*, or in Russian *baidara*, constructed for long sea travel, with the capacity to carry several paddlers and passengers (Crowell, Steffian, Pullar 2001: 152).

noted that a woman came aboard the ship with the traders, and judging by her appearance and the respect showed to her by the rest of the trading party, she must have held a high status in the group:

... Only one woman came to visit us, and she was treated by those who accompanied her with the greatest civility and respect: She might probably be a person of some dignity among them. Her face was clean, her complexion tolerable, and her features rather agreeable than otherwise (C.L. 1984: 32-33).

Although, C.L. does not mention the Aleksandrovscoe Fort, the expedition had to sail by the area on its way to Montague Island on the Prince William Sound. What he does mention however, is a group of Russians, who pulled their boats on shore and covered them with furs for protection, which was quite likely the predecessor of the Aleksandrovscoe settlement. Furthermore, C.L.'s description regarding the schedule of interactions, first being approached by one person in one boat, then by several boats, finally by a person of high standing in a larger company, reflects the ranked social system that is generally attributed to pre-contact Sugpiaq society. Captain Portlock is also credited with the discovery of the coal deposits at the mouth of Cook Inlet (Black 2004: 123, C.L. 1984: 26) during this voyage, and his name is preserved in a now abandoned settlement of the Lower Kenai Coast, which gained importance for the inhabitants of Nanwalek in the early 1900's.⁵³

In addition to the English and to the Russians, the Spanish Crown also expressed interest in the area. Four years after Portlock's voyage, in 1790, a Spanish expedition led by Salvador Fidalgo also visited the Aleksandrovscoe settlement on his way to explore the "Cook River"⁵⁴. Fidalgo describes the settlement as a wooden house with twenty-one Russians, surrounded by several huts (Olson 2002: 302). This encounter was preceded by an other Spanish journey in 1779 by Ignacio Arteaga on the *Princesa*, and Juan Francisco Bodega y Quadra on the *Favorita* (Olson 2002: vi). They made anchor across from the

⁵³ Portlock was occupied mainly by Sugpiaq people of the region in the first half of the 1900's, who worked at the local cannery, then later at the sawmill (English Bay Students 1980: 20).

⁵⁴ Meaning the Cook Inlet, which was believed to be a river at the time. In the late 18th century both English and Spanish explorers were dispatched to ascertain the extent of Russian presence in the region.

previously mentioned Elizabeth Island, where the crew went ashore, claimed the land for the Spanish Crown, and (re-)named the place as 'Our Lady of Regla' (Olson 2002: 178).⁵⁵ The expedition encountered Sugpiaq people numerous times on their voyage, and they were most impressed by the Sugpiaq seal gut parkas, and Sugpiaq people's skillful ways of building waterproof kayaks.⁵⁶

While Aleksandrovskoe was an important location for the Russians at the beginning of their American exploration, later on it lost its significance. It started out as the central settlement of the Kenai Peninsula for the Shelikov-Golikov Company, yet it was soon replaced by new forts and *artels*, one of which was established about 15 miles from the present day city of Kenai further up on the coast.⁵⁷ Additionally, the other Russian trading company in the region, the Lebedev-Lastochkin Company, was the primary rival to Shelikov's, even though Shelikov himself had shares in Lebedev-Lastochkin business. The competition between the two became fierce during the 1790's; open fighting, rebellions, and punishment of Natives allying themselves with the rival company often took place. The largest Lebedev-Lastochkin outpost in the Sugpiaq Alutiiq area was Nuchek on Hinchinbrook Island, which they held in possession until 1797 (Pierce 1990: 302). Among others, they also had a fort at current day Kasilof, Fort St. George⁵⁸, established in 1787, and later Fort St Nicholas at Kenai since 1791 (Sister Victoria 1974: 48-49), which were both the rivals of Fort Alexandrovsk. It took about twenty years to resolve the animosity amongst the various Russian companies and employees, which ended with the first charter of the Russian American Company issued to the Shelikov-Golikov enterprise by imperial authorities in 1799 providing them with monopoly in the American Colony (Khlebnikov 1973: 2). In the following decades Aleksandrovskoe gradually lost its importance in the life of the colony. With the

⁵⁵ Olson (2002) references Orth (1971: 201) regarding the identification of the place, which he said to be Port Chatham, another currently abandoned Sugpiaq village site in the vicinity of Portlock.

⁵⁶ "... and so no drop of water can get in [to the kayak], they use a sort of shirt made of bladders, especially sewn, which they tie around the edge of the opening, by which means it is impossible for any water to come in, no matter how much the sea rises" (Olson 2002: 177).

⁵⁷ According to Lydia Black, this later Shelikov-Golikov *artel* was not the same as Fort St. Nicholas at present day Kenai, which was in fact a Lebedev-Lastochkin post, although the two were consolidated into one after the creation of the RAC (Black 2004: 119).

⁵⁸ Described by Fidalgo as a fort very similar to the one in Aleksandrovskoe, except bigger, holding a steady number of 60 inhabitants (Olson 2002: 302).

geographical expansion of Russian America to new regions, such as the South East (Sitka area), and to the North West (Kuskokwim-Yukon area), and with the difficulties of traveling to the Lower Kenai coast, Fort Aleksandrovsk ceased to be central to the colonial administration. During the first half of the 19th century, Aleksandrovskoe was reduced to an *odinochka*, a one person outpost (Personal communication with Katherine L. Arndt 2004), with work crew that was sent out to Kodiak to hunt for fur animals alongside the Kenaitze *artels* (Khlebnikov 1973).⁵⁹

In contrast, the neighboring coal deposits became more and more important. Captain Portlock's discovery of coal piqued the interest of the RAC, and various personnel were sent out to survey the findings. While no archival sources exist to support the following suggestions, it is generally believed that one of these was Father Iuvenalii, an original member of the first religious mission to Alaska, who was on his way from Nuchek to Iliamna. Again, his visit to Aleksandrovskoe, or to the Lower Kenai coast is not a historical fact, yet the Sugpiat generally consider Fr. Iuvenalii to be the first Russian Orthodox priest to visit the region. Fr. Iuvenalii set out from Nuchek, where he baptized over 700 people (Veniaminov 1984: 235), to Kenai Bay in 1795. As Fr. Iuvenalii was trained in chemistry, he might have decided to inspect the coal deposits on the peninsula (Sister Victoria 1974: 51). Unfortunately, the only evidence of Fr. Iuvenalii's travels, his own "personal diary," has turned out to be a fabrication.⁶⁰ The only certainty regarding his travels on the Kenai Peninsula is that he in fact arrived to the Cook Inlet region, and local people usually view him as the priest who introduced Orthodoxy to their ancestors, by converting and baptizing them during this short visit (English Bay Students 1980).

⁵⁹ Kenai people became "islanders" in 1821, a special category freed from paying *iasak* (fur tax) and other duties. In exchange they had to work for the company, "half of all the male population between the ages of 18 and 50 could be taken from each Aleut village to hunt [for sea mammals] for the Company" (Fedorova 1975: 16).

⁶⁰ Lydia T. Black proved in her article "The Daily Journal of Reverend Father Juvenal: A Cautionary Tale" that the alleged manuscript was fully written by Ivan Petrov, an assistant of the historian Hubert Howe Bancroft (Black 1981: 34). Petrov also worked in Alaska on various errands, including governmental census; however, it still did not prevent him from feeding fictitious information to his superiors and through them to the public. "... historians are quick to point out that archival materials associated with the name Ivan Petrov cannot be taken at face value; one has called Petrov the 'Baron Munchausen of the copy room'" (Black 1981: 34, Pierce 1964: 10).

After leaving the Kenai area, Fr. Iuvenalii traveled to Lake Iliamna and possibly even further north into Yup'ik territory, where he was killed by locals.⁶¹

In any case, by the 1850's *Gornaia Ekspeditsiia* (Горная Экспедиция), as the settlement of Coal Mine⁶² was called in Russian documents, was outfitted for production, and serviced by approximately 80 people (Pierce 1975: 107). The reason for developing the mine was governed by the RAC's desire to offset the company's losses from the declining fur trade. The newly discovered gold in California and the increased demand for coal seemed like a good investment opportunity (Dmytryshyn 1989: 510-511), and Peter Doroshin, a mining engineer sent out by the RAC in 1853, reported favorable prospects on the coal deposits near Port Graham (Pierce 1975: 104). In 1855 Enoch Furuhjelm, a Finnish mining engineer in the service of the RAC, was dispatched to the current location of Coal Mine along with a 45 member crew of various origins (Furuhjelm in Pierce 1975: 196). Furuhjelm spent eight years at Coal Mine, creating not only a mining industry but also a settlement, in fact the third largest settlement of Russian America (Furuhjelm in Pierce 1975: 107), which received 409 workers brought over from Russia between 1857 and 1863⁶³ (Fedorova 1975: 8).

... the village contained a church, 20 various-sized dwellings, a large warehouse, two stables, an engine lathe, a sawmill, a blacksmith's shop, the mine superstructure, a kitchen, a small foundry, and some sheds; the production of coal amounted to 5,000 tons, and the expedition had eleven head of cattle and two horses (Furuhjelm in Pierce 1975: 107).

Although the Company invested considerable resources in Coal Village and the mine, the business was not profitable. The expenses of mining and delivering a lower

⁶¹ For quite a while, based on the aforementioned journal of Father Iuvenalii, his place of martyrdom was believed to be the Iliamna Lake area. However, Michael Oleksa proved in his study "The death of Hieromonk Juvenaly," by compiling written and oral sources that his actual place of martyrdom was at current village of Quinhagak (Oleksa 1987: 354).

⁶² Coal Mine, Coal Village and *Gornaia Ekspeditsiia* are all names used to describe the settlement that was built in the vicinity of the coal deposits.

⁶³ The coal mine was in operation between 1850 and 1865. These workers were brought over during the most productive years.

grade coal to California outweighed the profit that could be earned; therefore the village was officially closed down in 1865.

Coal Mine, for the Sugpiaq of the region, did not completely cease to exist. Some of the buildings and properties were transferred to Aleksandrovscoe, including the church bell, and presumably other religious items as well, such as icons, crosses, service items, prayer and service books. Although the first Orthodox Church of the Lower Kenai Peninsula was the one erected in Coal Mine, and its existence was cut short by the changing RAC policies, it lived on in the neighboring settlement of Aleksandrovscoe. The local oral history dates the erection of the first church in Nanwalek to the 1860's, but the exact location of this Church is unclear. People usually place it in the vicinity of the lagoon, in the area currently occupied by the store and the school (Interview with Natalie Kvasnikoff 2006). The first church of Nanwalek is believed to have burnt down in the 1890's, yet it is possible that people rescued religious items from the building, and placed them in the new church buildings. The icon of the Theotokos and the icon of Christ on the iconostas of Nanwalek's currently used church bear the inscription of Valaam Monastery of Russia, the home of the first Orthodox monks of Alaska. Alternately, the icons might have been donated for the use of the community of the fort, and not directly to the Church.

The Russian Orthodox Church Archives contain continuous yearly reports on the St Sergius and Herman parish and church starting from 1857 (Alaska Russian Church Archives M/F 139). The following description depicts the state of affairs in 1916:

Aleksandrovskaia settlement

Sts Sergius and Herman of Valaam

The structure of the wooden chapel was constructed diligently by the local people in 1872. In 1896 the chapel was encouraged to put up a cross and acquire a gospel. In 1897 the chapel got two large silver plated candlesticks. In 1898 the building was newly renovated the interior and exterior walls were trimmed [...] and repainted with oil paints of white color. The cupola was given a new tiling, the half of the floor was redone, and the other half was [.....], the ceiling similarly repainted with oil paints of light blue colors. The iconostas was separately renovated and they added on a new church porch.

Around the structure of the church a fence was added/enclosed... The service items were sufficient (translation by Alexandra Antohin).

During the 19th century, and for the most part of the 20th century, Nanwalek and the surrounding settlements were serviced by priests based out of Kenai. The life of these priests and monks involved lengthy travels in harsh weather conditions, in order to fulfill the minimal yearly visits to all their parishes, and in many occasions, they failed to make it to all the villages. For this reason, they encouraged their parishioners to move closer to settlements where there was a church in place already, so that they could administer the sacraments to all their adherents (Interview with John Moonin 2008). This practice led to further consolidations both in population and in church property in the region, and many locals moved from the outer Kenai coast closer to Fort Aleksandrovsk and Coal Mine. Peter Macha, a Sugpiaq man from Yalik, moved to Aleksandrovsk for this very reason in the 1860's, and took on a job at the coal mine across the bay, where he worked "for very poor wages, under extremely hard working conditions" (English Bay Students 1980: 18). Later, he married a local Creole girl by the name of Kathleen Romanov, and they became the parents to Marfa Macha, who was married to the first Orthodox priest born in the region, Nicholas Moonin.

The first Munin (current spelling Moonin) who came to Alaska was Efim Munin from the Yeniseisk region of Siberia (Osborn 1997: 382) in 1820. By profession he was a carpenter, and was registered as such at Fort Ross, the Californian colony of Russian America. He was a *baidarchik*, a work crew foreman, and an experienced farmer (Arndt 1993: 37). At Fort Ross he married a Creole woman from Kodiak by the name of Elisaveta, who gave birth to a daughter in 1821. Elisaveta had passed away and by 1836 Efim started a new family with a common-law Aleut wife Agripina, whom he later legally married in church (Personal Communication with Katherine Arndt 2008). Together they had three sons, Apolon, Ioann and Andrei, and two daughters, Natalia and Agripina (Osborn 1997: 382-383). After the sale of Fort Ross to John Sutter, the Munins moved to Sitka, and from there they were sent forward to Ninilchik, a new experimental retirement community of the RAC (Arndt 1993). Interestingly, the main economic support for the retirees was designed around their vegetable and food production that was supposed to be sold to the workers of Coal Village. As the person transferred to Ninilchik

alongside Efim Munin passed away in the same year, Efim decided to move to Fort St Nicholas at Kenai instead.⁶⁴ At the same time, his son Ioann Munin stayed in the San Francisco area until the 1850's, when he decided to move his family to Kodiak. While on Kodiak, his wife passed away, and he re-married the Creole Helen Medvidnikoff, with whom he had three children. The couple moved to the Kachemak Bay region to do missionary work for the Orthodox Church in the 1860's, and as the local legend holds, on a short visit to Aleksandrovsk, Helen fell so in love with the beauty of the area that she asked her husband to settle down there, which was requested from and granted by the Orthodox Church authorities.

In addition to the Moonins, other Russian ancestors of the people living in Nanwalek also became involved in the Ninilchik enterprise. Grigorii Kvasnikov (current spelling Kvasnikoff), originally a burgher from the Kaluga region (Arndt 1993: 40), elsewhere described as a silk merchant from Moscow (John Kennedy in Leman 1993: 25), was a company worker on Kodiak with a family of nine, when he requested to be allowed to continue with the company plans at the retirement settlement. He was granted permission to re-locate to Ninilchik, where he stayed until his death in 1858 (Russian Church Archives in Arndt 1993: 40).⁶⁵ His youngest son Ioann (Ivan) Kvasnikov and his wife Alexandra Sorokovikoff had a son in 1881, whom they named John, and who, as an adult, became a lay reader in the local Orthodox Church. John Kvasnikoff, by then a widower with three children, met Nicholas Moonin living in Homer at the time, and the two men, both involved with the Russian Orthodox Church, became friends. Later on a series of intermarriages followed between the two Creole families, who shared many similarities in their descent and family history, and which deeply affected the current population of Nanwalek.⁶⁶

Repeated re-locations, transfers and the complicated family relations resulting from such practices were an every day reality for most Russians, Creoles, and

⁶⁴ Efim Munin was in his 70's, and did not want to take on the responsibilities of starting up a new community by himself (Arndt 1993: 37).

⁶⁵ Grigorii Kvasnikoff was 47 years old at the time of their arrival to Ninilchik, while his Creole wife Mavra, presumably from Kodiak, was 31. Their children were Matfei 16, Feodor 15, Ioann 1, Elena 13, Anna 11, Feodosiia 9, Paraskoviia 7 and Tat'iana 5 years of age (Arndt 1993: 40).

⁶⁶ It is not my intention here to provide a detailed kinship chart, rather to help understand the interconnectedness of the various factors influencing the current population of Nanwalek. For further reference on Nanwalek genealogy please refer to Aleksandrovsk 1980.

Natives alike in the colony. The RAC moved people around for various reasons, according to the company's best interest and momentary needs, and for most employees, the "nomadic" lifestyle was not peculiar or unfamiliar. These relocations resulted in significant changes in the population of various villages and settlements, as also the ways people, Native and non-Native alike, perceived one another as well as themselves.

As I previously described, extending the possibility of acquiring high-status positions to Native Alaskans was embedded in both the Russian Colonial and the Russian Orthodox ideology regarding social hierarchies. Creoles and Aleuts, as special classes of people with multicultural background and with loyalty to the Company were absolutely necessary to maintain and run the colonial administration. Creoles and Aleuts were also needed to keep the Orthodox faith alive in the remote areas and in Native villages. Because Orthodoxy has always placed more emphasis on Christianization by cultural incorporation rather than assimilation, the hierarchical positions within the church were open and accessible for Alaska Natives. Naturally, taking up such positions was a result of a series of negotiations involving, social, cultural and religious ideas about what was perceived as "one's own" and "the foreign" intellectual framework. The way people perceived the ongoing changes and reacted to them, such as taking on leadership positions in the Orthodox Church and in the RAC, or relocating to particular settlements with Orthodox Churches, are all elements of the process that is religious syncretism, because they reflect the politics involved in religious synthesis.

Taking the people of Nanwalek as an example, we have already seen that some families came from Russia through California and the Spanish colonies, others were originally from Kodiak or the Aleutians, while others again, were living at the settlements of the Kenai coast, or commuting between the Prince William Sound and the Lower Kenai Peninsula. Most of these local families are still represented in Nanwalek, and while extended families can grow or shrink in size with time, their presence is usually maintained by intermarriages and having children. Besides the two Creole families, the Moonins and the Kvasnikoffs, the Romanovs can also trace back their origin to a Russian ancestor; while the Tanape, Ukatish, Macha, Anahonak, Meganack, Mumchuk family names among others are associated with the various Sugpiaq villages and settlements (Stanek 2000: 13-17).

In addition to family names, first names, and especially nowadays Church names, are also excellent indicators of these kinship relations. Certain female and male names repeatedly turn up in the extended families and it is not unusual to have several people living in the community who share the same first names or Church names. Many of these names, especially those used as church names, are quite archaic and are often preserved in their older forms, and even those who have a modern English name for their first name have one of these ancient names reserved for church use.

The various names, both family and first names, provide insight into the various interconnections between families and the locations they visited during their re-locations in the Kenai region of Alaska. Although there are many factors that influence the level of mobility in the life-style of a particular group of people, the Sugpiaq of the area gradually altered their highly mobile lifestyle to that of nearly sedentary during the course of the 20th century.

Fluctuation experienced in demographics is often associated with economic factors, which is the case in the Sugpiaq settlements of the lower Kenai Peninsula as well. After the sale of Alaska to the U.S. in 1867, the RAC trading post of Aleksandrovscoe was taken over by the Alaska Commercial Company (ACC), like many posts abandoned by the Russians following the sale. With the Russian American Company went all its records, including the church records, and a large part of the written history of the region; nevertheless, due to their devotion to their faith, similarly to many other Native settlements, Nanwalek managed to maintain its church despite many unfortunate circumstances that characterize the 20th century. In fact, one of the church buildings currently standing in Nanwalek was purchased from the ACC for two sea otter pelts (Kenneth S. Cohen collection Box 9, Folder 179, Brewster 2004, Interview with Sally Ash 2005), and was in active use until the 1960s, when the construction of a larger building became necessary to accommodate the growing population.

The ACC manager of Nanwalek, Maxwell Cohen, originally from Germany, stayed at that location for 20 years. Cohen assisted Captain Johan Adrian Jacobsen, a Norwegian by birth, who conducted a journey between 1881 and 1883 on behalf of the Royal Museum in Berlin. His mission was to collect “ethnological specimens” for the museum, and the funds to cover the expenses of the expedition were provided by the Ethnological Aid Committee. He arrived to Fort Aleksandrovs from Seldovia and

conducted excavations with various successes around the settlement. Unfortunately, his method of collection, reflecting the contemporary “scientific practice” and theoretical approach, varied from purchasing to “just taking” throughout his journey, which methods he deliberately applied for artifacts and human remains as well.⁶⁷

The first decades of the 20th century brought a definite economic boost to the region. In 1907 Aleksandrovsk made an attempt to place a fish saltery in the vicinity of the lagoon, and while it was not a viable enterprise, it did signal the start of a new area for the Sugpiat. By 1900 the seasonal camp at the end of the Graham’s Bay started to take shape as a new permanent village of Port Graham. Or at least, it was called Port Graham after 1909, due to the error of a misguided cartographer, creating maps around the Kachemak Bay for the US Geological Survey (English Bay Students 1980: 11). The complication arose from the misinterpretation of the Russian usage of these names: Port Graham Bay (Graham’s port) was re-named to English Bay after Portlock’s visit in 1786, basically referring to the place where Russians encountered the English. At the same time, the Russians still used “Port Graham” in connection with Aleksandrovscoe or Coal Mine. The USGS however used the name Port Graham to the new settlement starting up with a cannery located further in the bay, while English Bay was used to label Aleksandrovsk. In 1992 people took the matter into their own hands, and by public vote, officially changed back the village’s name to the original Sugtestun name Nanwalek: place by the lagoon (McCoy 1992). For the larger part of the 20th century, however, Nanwalek was known as English Bay, and the name for the settlement in the bay remained Port Graham.

In this chapter I provided an introduction to the various sequence of events and trends that shaped historic and current Sugpiaq experiences on the Lower Kenai Peninsula as “to avoid portraying an abstract, a-historical “other”” (Clifford 1983: 119). Furthermore, I also demonstrated the implications that resulted from the numerous intercultural encounters, and ways these interactions influenced Sugpiaq interpretations

⁶⁷ In one especially controversial case Jacobsen did not have any problem taking two mummies found near Chenega, although he declared that he “could not assume that these mummies were of great age, for [he] found near them a piece of wood that had been cut with a saw” (Jacobsen 1977: 204). Furthermore, the National Museum of Berlin still holds a large collection of artifacts that resulted from Jacobsen’s voyage, and which is largely unexplored even today (Personal Communication with Lydia Black 2004).

and coping strategies. With reconstructing the historical background, I also wished to emphasize Sugpiaq peoples' incredible abilities, with which they coped with continuous change, and re-interpreted and re-focused their cultural and social realities. I agree with Fr. Michael Oleksa (2005: 109), who stresses the remarkable qualities of Sugpiaq peoples in their readiness in taking action and adapting to new circumstances. Therefore, by drawing on the information that constituted the various aspects of being Sugpiaq in the past, in the following chapter, I am focusing on providing an insight into the Sugpiaq lived experience in Nanwalek today.

3. Being Sugpiaq Now

“The fieldworker can never hope to maintain a good rate of work very long. In my time in Africa, I estimated that I perhaps spent one per cent of my time doing what I had actually gone for. The rest of the time was spent on logistics, being ill, being sociable, arranging things, getting from place to place, and above all, waiting” (Barley 2000: 98).

In comparison with the previous chapter, I have a valid basis for claiming at least some kind of knowledge of what it is like to be Sugpiaq now. True, it is rather partial, and undoubtedly limited. Yet, it is my intention to provide a description on the everyday life of Nanwalek, by accentuating the notions of relatedness, the rules and consequences of sharing resources and assistance, the etiquette that governs social behavior, and the channels through which these ideas are communicated. I chose these topics with the notions of social interactions and their importance in creating and maintaining networks in mind. To understand the politics of internalizing Russian Orthodoxy into Sugpiaq reality, it is important to have a concept of that reality. Without understanding the social networks that are constantly created, dissolved, and re-created based on momentary considerations it would be impossible to grasp the connections that turned Orthodoxy from being a purely religious affiliation to an expression of Sugpiaq identity. Consequently, in this chapter, I provide an ethnographic description on the social-cultural life of Sugpiaq people currently living in Nanwalek, which I employ in delineating the analogies embedded in Sugpiaq Russian Orthodoxy.

3.1. On the Importance of “Getting the Memo”

I was looking at the village through my open door facing the edge of the cliff. It was a warm July evening in Nanwalek, with the sun still high in the horizon. The village reminded me of a popular resort town, something straight out of a movie. Trucks and hondas were driving up and down the airstrip around the village, piled high with elders, kids and teenagers, and followed by brawling dogs in every imaginable shape, size and

color. The kids' giggles and laughs were still audible through the noise of the traffic, teasing each other, fighting for the best seats or calling out to passerby.

Several of us were sitting at the edge of the cliff, drinking coffee, some were smoking, joking, exchanging greetings with people driving or walking by, listening to the music coming from a nearby house, and watching the waves crawling up higher and higher on the shore. It was high tide, and the reef was almost completely covered, except the top of the big rock at the end. Around it, a group of sea otters were playing, ducking under the water for clams, fish and other delicacies at the annoyance of the people, for they were stealing tomorrow's catch. Two skiffs were anchored about 100 yards out in the bay, waiting to be taken out in the morning for fishing or crossing over to Homer. Closer to the shore a sea lion was trying to steal the fish out of the seining nets. Judging from the dipping of the top floats, the net was filling up and the tide was bringing in a good catch. While sitting at our "backyard" enjoying the view and the atmosphere, a banya slowly started up, the thick smoke curling towards the cliff than suddenly whisked away by an unexpected breeze towards the ocean.

Judging from the unanimous moan and yelling coming from across the street, someone had just dropped a pass, and the teenagers playing ball in the church yard carried on with the game, their clothes randomly thrown around the field and their faces lit up with excitement. On the road, coming downhill from the Community Hall, a band of five year olds, bored by the complexity of the game, started to chase some dogs down towards the beach, halfway through changing their minds to cut through the meadow of wildflowers towards the school, where their older siblings and perhaps their parents were playing basketball. At the bottom of the slope, down at the airport shed, a group of women were crouching and sitting around shallow holes in the ground, digging and shifting through the dirt with spoons, in hopes of finding beads and other "Russian" items. Their attention split between the holes and their kids playing close by; from their tight circle a head poking up now and then to check around, to sort out little ones, or to yell at a dog. Across from their company, down on the beach a boy was getting off his honda to dump the content of his bucket; fish guts and bones, under the watching eyes of some hundred seagulls. As soon as he stepped away from the spot, the birds attacked the feast, and before he got back on his machine, an eagle dived down to take his share.

It was almost 9 o'clock at night, and the airstrip, serving as the local promenade after the air traffic ended for the day, was filled with romancing teenagers, a pair of expectant mothers completing their daily walks under the supervision of their own mothers and aunts, a couple of joggers, and a variety of walkers and strollers enjoying one another's company. There were still some people down at the end of the airstrip fishing for humpies while keeping an eye out for bears that might surprise them from the other side of the channel.

The village was alive with energy and filled with excitement even as the day was drawing to a conclusion, sharing a moment of togetherness. That was when I realized; I have finally gotten the memo. Not just any memo, but the same memo as everybody else did. At that particular moment, I was supposed to drop everything else, put all worries aside and enjoy the company of my friends, joining in the general feeling engulfing the village. It took me over thirteen months to realize it, but I finally did so. Sadly, another thought struck me immediately, that I have got what I came for, and the time of going home was near, briefly experiencing the forthcoming "... anguish and loss at leaving" (Pratt 1986: 31).

It has been suggested that when you understand and can genuinely laugh at three local jokes, then you have probably collected enough information through your research to confidently leave the field behind. In my case, it was somewhat different. I have learned to recognize some of the teasing and joking that was the very fabric of every day life in Nanwalek, even though I had a hard time understanding them, which, of course, provided an additional level of amusement for people. On one memorable occasion, however, I not only managed to perceive the comical side of a happenstance, despite its embeddedness in the local language and context, but also was able to recount it to others in the village while preserving its original meaning.

In the Orthodox Church the forty days following Easter is spent in celebration and essentially it is regarded as an extension of the feast. Accordingly, people greet each other with the Easter greeting "Christ is risen!," to which the response comes: "Indeed He is risen!" This exchange of greeting is repeated daily with every single person, old and young alike, as well as being used in emails, instant messaging, and answering the phone. It is a greeting that is translated to many languages, and people enjoy "mixing up" its

usage in the spirit of Easter⁶⁸, therefore hearing “*Christos Voskrese!*” “*Vaistinu Voskrese!*” in Russian, and “*Kristusaaq Unguirtuq!*” “*Piciinek Unguirtuq!*” in Sugtestun is an everyday practice. So after church service is over, everybody greets each other with one version of this greeting, and then exchanges kisses on the cheeks or on the mouth, depending on the closeness of their relationship. On one occasion after vespers, Matushka Tatiana (the wife of the local priest, Father Sergie) was getting ready to leave the church after having exchanged greetings with everyone except for one of the little boys brought to service by a sibling. She turned to scoop him up and kiss him, meanwhile saying “*Kristusaaq Unguirtuq!*” (Christ is Risen!) to which the boy proudly responded: “*Ucinguq Unguirtuq!*” (The old lady is risen!). The little boy accidentally mixed up the Sugtestun word for Indeed (*Piciinek*) with the similarly sounding Old lady (*Ucinguq*), putting a new, and somewhat alarming, twist on the greeting. Naturally, it was an honest mistake similar to many other ones children make while growing up, and while Matushka corrected and assured the child, she has also acknowledged the story’s comical value. When I recited her story to others, people usually smiled, and many told me about similar, mostly language related, mistakes they have made while growing up.

This occasion signified several different milestones in my fieldwork. First, it was a comical event that I fully perceived through the local perspective, without the explicit need of further explanation and elaboration. By then, I had learnt enough about life in Nanwalek to understand the cultural context, and had the background information to be able to interpret it as “funny”. Secondly, I did all the above without even realizing that I actually followed the same thought process as everyone else did in the village.

It had not been like that in the first couple months of the fieldwork, however. Many occasions, I did not understand why people were doing things, or why did they choose certain activities or opportunities over others. Similarly to Rosaldo (in Sass 1986: 49), who had remarked on his miscomprehension regarding Ilongot response to his complex questions, I was also at loss when it came to understanding the inherent cultural logic of the village. In retrospect of course, it would have been exceptionally strange to perceive the nuanced thought process that seemed to govern people’s lives in Nanwalek

⁶⁸ In Eastern Christianity the Easter Gospel reading is supposed to be read in several (generally at least three) different languages to show that everyone is included in the celebration of Christ’s Resurrection.

right away. This “culturally [...] straightforward juxtaposition” (Morrow 1992: 68), which needed no further elaboration on their part was embedded not only in communication, but also in local etiquette, behavior, knowing one’s own standing in society and in relations to others’ status, as well as being aware of one’s own duties, responsibilities, actions and the expected responses. Such understanding can only be acquired through time and continuous, and sometimes torturously humiliating, trials-and-errors. Briggs had remarked on her initial inability to grasp her daughterly duties of making tea when prompted by her adoptive father, and that her only clue in figuring out her social transgression was the quality of her adoptive mother’s laugh, because “nobody had informed [her] that [her] behavior was out of order” (Briggs 1970: 253). Likewise, avoiding direct confrontation is part of social life in Nanwalek as well, and it is used in maintaining relationships within social networks.

It is easy to expect such differences in logic and social behavior in general, yet much more difficult to recognize them at work. In Nanwalek it is not simply the question of “getting the message,” but in fact it is the importance of “getting the memo”. First of all, actual memos are being delivered to everyone’s mailbox on a weekly basis, which contain notices and updates regarding the life of the village. They cover a wide range of topics: from water usage and dog-round ups to the schedule of clinic and to the monthly schedule of church services. A memo is a more collective form of communication than a message; it is out in the open for everyone to know and understand, yet it needs to be interpreted in a particular manner to make sense. A virtual memo is similar in nature, but it pertains to events that are not explicitly stated. Everybody in Nanwalek interprets it and reacts to it the same way because it is the appropriate thing to do. If someone diverges, it either needs to be explained with a valid reason, or it simply means that he or she did not understand the memo, which happened to me at the beginning of my fieldwork.

During the first few months, I spent a considerable amount of time fixing the house issued to me, and making it livable for the winter to come. One day, while shopping at the store, I overheard people talking about going to Dogfish, which was an abandoned village site further out on the coast. At the time, it had an out of use logging camp with several equipped rooms, kitchen, and electric generator, but to get there, one needed to drive up on the trail leading to the lakes, cross Humpy Creek, follow the trail through Second Lake (in the water), and then complete the travel on a dirt road. By honda

it was probably an hour ride, and quite often people went over to Dogfish in small groups using several vehicles. In a sense, it was a collective vacation spot, an escape from the village, where people could relax without phones and TVs interrupting their lives, and where there were opportunities to enjoy picking berries or collecting subsistence foods. So when people took off to spend some times at Dogfish, they often went camping, and usually left with a group of friends, with all their kids and plenty of provisions in tow, as they were to be gone for a few days at least. Sometimes adults would round up most kids and take them over to Dogfish for a day or two, as to a “summer camp,” where they would have them clean up the buildings and teach them about subsistence. Of course, at first I had no idea about the significance of the place for locals, and I did not understand why would people want to go 10 miles over just to sleep in an abandoned building. Therefore when they mentioned it to me suggestively to “follow” everyone and spend some time over at Dogfish I politely declined and figured that I’ll see them in a couple of days when they had enough of camping. Except, I did not. For some reason, more and more people took off to Dogfish, and none came back, so in the following three days the village practically emptied out, leaving only a handful of us behind, mostly locals who were holding permanent jobs. I was completely bewildered. When and why did this happen, and how come I did not see it coming? Most importantly how did everyone know to drop all their projects and involvements and leave in a particular moment, to a particular place? There had to be a memo, a memo that I did not receive, and which was distributed in a clandestine manner. It took me a few months to realize that the elusive memo was real, and I was indeed given the opportunity in the form of an indirect invitation (Morrow 1992: 60), which I declined; in retrospect, not a very polite reaction on my part. Nevertheless, I learned to be on the lookout for further notice. After all, it was not that I was never *given* the memo; rather it was that I have never understood that it *was* a memo, or later, what it actually *meant*. In Maussian terms: local people fulfilled their social obligation to give me the information, but I failed to fulfill my obligation to receive it (Mauss 1990: 13).

I confess, the legendary wink of Geertz’s “thick description” has escaped me, and I innocently took it for a blink (Geertz 2000). After some time however, mostly by learning about and experiencing the cultural context, a pattern started to emerge, which allowed me to at least recognize the memo for what it was. Although I would never claim

that my initial ignorance and confusion had changed to “adult, confident, disabused knowledge” (Clifford 1983: 132), eventually I did have a better understanding. I learned the hard way, as I am sure many other anthropologist in the field have that the first couple of weeks of fieldwork are similar to an ill fitting garment that is, while useful, very uncomfortable. As time goes by, however, it stretches and molds to the body to the point that it is no longer unfamiliar, rather it becomes natural and unimaginable that we should ever need to part with it, which is basically how I became to think about life in Nanwalek.

3.2. The Readiness of the Opportunist

One of the many novelties of my life in Nanwalek was the idea of always being ready (Barker and Barker 1993). As life in Nanwalek operates on a “need to” basis, as being ready was not simply an activity that one does on certain occasions; rather, it was an all encompassing attitude. Things and activities are arranged in response to a suddenly emerging need or occasion that has to be dealt with in an immediate manner. It is very rare to plan ahead for more than one or two days; in fact, most people do not even know what they are going to be doing the following day. Sure, plans can be made in advance, but there is no reason to insist on following them, as life – both social and natural – will decide what will actually have to be done. Such an approach to every day life requires the development of certain characteristics that are very different from life in a town or in a city. Living in a remote Native village in Alaska changes perspectives on many aspects of life and priorities change considerably as well. Flexibility becomes the most valued attitude that is absolutely indispensable to navigate through the events of a day, and the ultimate tool that one automatically turns to in moments of confusion, surprise, and in general when faced with the unexpected.

Briggs also remarks on the similarities between the characteristics needed to cope with natural disasters and social distress which she describes as “a constant maintenance of a state of alert” (Briggs 1991: 259, 261). She draws attention to the Inuit approach to the world in its entirety as an inherently dangerous place, which requires not only constant readiness and flexibility of people living in it, but also specific skills and attitudes in order to cope with the ever changing circumstances (Briggs 1991: 266).

Shannon (2003) also explores the interrelations between readiness and skill in the context of procurement and sharing. It is safe to assume that in most small, compact communities it is essential to have an ability to realize an opportunity, the skills to act on it, and the readiness to be able to cope with the unexpected. I also argue that a way to cope with the unexpected, based on my experiences in Nanwalek, is to be a part of a social network, and to constantly rely on it in times of need.

Similarly to other Northern communities, people living in Nanwalek face the unexpected every single day. Waking up each morning, people can entertain the idea of concocting elaborate plans, organizing daily chores and maybe even leisurely activities into hourly time schemes just to find them utterly destroyed by the real life of the village, that follows no plans and really does not have any regard for personal ambitions. I remember being awoken on various mornings by a variety of people informing me that I have parcels waiting in the airport shed, have a phone call in the neighboring council building, need to go to church as service has already started, need to go and have breakfast/lunch in the community hall, or need to be ready to evacuate the village as, according to the Internet, volcanic eruption was imminent. Needless to say, I had no plans to do any of these activities on those given days, yet, I needed to react to them, and at the same time completely abandon all other arrangements made in advance. The most surprising aspect of such events is that people in Nanwalek, based on their life experiences, learned not to even mind the intrusion of the unexpected into their life, and to abandon plans on a moment's notice; in truth, most people have abandoned plan-making altogether.

I had difficulties in getting used to the attitude of always being ready. During the period of late autumn and early winter there was no delivery of fresh fruits and vegetables to Nanwalek, due to a misunderstanding between the store and the supplier. Every day I would make my way down to the store to check if the fresh produce had arrived, and every day I would come home disappointed. Most people ended up flying out to Homer to buy provisions or put in orders with relatives traveling outside. Since I did not have a specific reason to get out of the village, I was relying on the kindness of others who shared their own supply of vegetables and occasionally surprised me with a couple of pieces of fruit. Periodically, the rumor of an imminent massive fresh vegetable delivery would launch, just to be crushed by a new period of endless waiting. By January,

after voluntarily forgoing a chocolate cake in favor of some orange slices at a potluck, I realized that I would need to make arrangements to order my own supplies of vegetables preferably before the onset of the Christmas festivities (January 5th). The weather was especially bad at the time however; therefore it was impossible to schedule a flight out, and knowing that it would be a month-long celebration, I put my efforts into getting ready for Christmas instead. Thus, when the fabled delivery finally arrived on the first day of Christmas, I was following the Star from house to house, not knowing what was going on. At one point, I needed to pick up more disks for my video camera, and decided to head back to my house, passing by the store which was engulfed by a large group of people, all hauling boxes and bags to their hondas. Somebody waved down at me shouting the good news, and I quickened my pace with the intention of grabbing some money and heading back down to the store. I was surprised to find a huge box filled with the most perplexing selections of produce on my table. Apparently, while my husband was visiting at somebody's house, a phone call alerted his hosts to the arrival of the delivery, and along with everyone else he ran down to the store. There, he was swept inside the building where people were surrounding the haphazardly placed boxes. He said it was not the question of what he wanted to buy, rather what was thrown at him. People opened boxes and pulled out items laughingly throwing them over each other's head, calling out to announce what they had found, and exchanging whatever they had through a medley of hands, yells, and flying vegetables. He said after a while, having no idea what had landed in his basket, he proceeded to the cashier to pay for it, where he was mildly surprised by his own efficiency as well as by the huge variety of produce that normally we would have never bought.

People in Nanwalek were conditioned for constant preparedness by several natural and cultural factors of their lives. I have seen my friend, Wally, sink into a chair before the beginning of a project, to allow time for the entire work crew to assemble, with an exasperated look while saying: "... aaaaaand hurry up and wait, *again*" The reason people in Nanwalek are able to promptly react to challenges and opportunities stem from a system of culturally constructed coping mechanism that cover every imaginable aspect of life, and it is carefully balanced on the notions of waiting and acting. Despite the fact that such waiting and acting is a shared and learned characteristic of people in the village, it is also not a specific, but a completely abstract phenomenon.

The importance of being ready for anything, previously unknowable, that might happen inherently implies a good deal of waiting, an ability to act in an instant, and a constant awareness of one's own social landscape within which all these actions are interpreted. To live with the unexpected, it is not enough to be personally ready; one has to know that others in the social network are ready as well.

3.2.1. Living with the Unexpected

Weather is probably one of the most unpredictable aspects of life in Nanwalek, and in general it is also one of the major forces that cause village-wide emergencies and problems. Yes, there is weather forecasting, and for a couple of years now even a meteorological station has been set up on the runway, yet it does not change the fact of people constantly being exposed to the whims of their natural surroundings. Weather plays a crucial role in people's lives. Storms, especially during the winter months, can mean complete isolation from the rest of the world, which requires people to rely on themselves and on each other. They also need to be prepared and ready for all kinds of emergencies that can be physical, medical, or even social in nature, yet they all are very real and all need to be resolved and attended to. Mutual reliance on each other is still a major pledge of survival in remote locations, which is achieved by constantly and actively cultivating one's own social network. To be able to cope with the hardships of life and have a support system that an individual can rely on is an absolute necessity, and requires much sacrifice from all parties involved.

In one sense, sharing is a coercive interaction (Sharp 1994: 40) involving all within a social network. Additionally, it is not limited to material goods and services; rather it involves political, emotional, economic and religious considerations. It might also be prompted by altruistic reasons; however, even this selfless sharing denotes and is constrained by a particular social context. Sharing, as a concept of organizing social relations, has been discussed in several works (Balikci 1970, Bodenhorn 2000a, Burch 1988, Collings and Wenzel and Condon, 1998, Freeman and Wein and Keith 1992, Wenzel 1995, 2000 etc.). The mutual nature of sharing also highlights a characteristic that is indispensable in understanding people's approach to dealing with the unexpected in an arctic environment. To be able to help oneself, or others, within the support

network, people always need to be ready and prepared. Therefore, while it is very rare to make specific plans, people generally have a good idea regarding all the various kinds of disasters that lurk just around the corner, and which actively shape their physical and social landscape. For this reason, people also learn to quickly recognize opportunities that can be valuable or useful, and it is expected from everyone in the village to seize, both figuratively and literally, whatever life throws at them.

On one occasion, a few of us were checking a long-line set up in the bay right in front of the village. It was a beautiful spring day, with almost no wind and rapidly rising temperature. The catch was small, but we did have couple of Irish lords, an enormous starfish, and the first fresh red salmon (sockeye) of the season. While the six of us were enjoying the activity, we saw a speedboat coming out from the lagoon through the channel and pulling up beside us. It was Emerson, whose father and siblings were sitting in our boat with my husband and I. He said he had just gotten a call from someone who needed to get a ride over to the neighboring village right away; otherwise the person would not be able to take his place as a crew on a commercial fishing boat, so he was heading over to Port Graham as soon as his passenger showed up. His sister immediately volunteered to go along, since she has been planning on checking out the privately run and better-stocked store of the neighboring village, and she proceeded to climb over to his brother's boat. As I had never been over to Port Graham before, apart from the short stopovers during flying in and out of Nanwalek, I agreed to my husband's suggestion of joining the shopping party.

So it was decided that Emerson would wait for us to run up to our house and get money, after which we would head over to Port Graham. Before we had a chance to gather our belongings from the house, it turned out that even more people got word of the opportunity, and as the boat was too small for all the hopeful aspirants, Emerson had to make two trips. As a result, some of us ended up spending over an hour on the beach sitting on a washed up tree chatting with passerby with the air of resignation to the inevitable. During this time I learned that people preferred to go to the private store over at Port Graham if they had a chance, as it carried many household and utility items in addition to groceries, and it was not only considerably cheaper than the store in Nanwalek or even in Homer, but also had the "right" brands, the exact thing people were looking for. By the time Emerson had returned, 'Debby's store' reached a level of a

mystical cornucopia to me, just to learn upon my arrival to Port Graham, that it was to close down for the day in thirty minutes. So we rushed up to the store, marveled at the selection and the low prices with great gusto, and bought whatever items we could find in our frenzy. Thereby laden with a variety of boxes and packages, my companions enlisted a local relative to take our goods down to the boat in the back of his truck, and we happily made our way back to Nanwalek, satisfied by the outcome of our shopping trip. Indeed, it was a successful event, and no one considered the over an hour wait for the fifteen minute ride too long or pointless. In fact, nobody even gave it a second thought, as having to wait for something was a part of the daily routine, and it was perfectly normal, requiring no further explanation or comment. It was just an aspect of life that had to be done in order to achieve a more important and desirable outcome, and ultimately, they were successful and effective in seizing an opportunity.

Readiness combined with a long period of waiting has been discussed in works describing arctic life (Shannon 2003, Barker and Barker 1993, Briggs 1991 etc.), and indeed, it is an important element of life in Nanwalek as well. The results of missing an opportunity can cause serious problems and inconveniences and the prospect of having to deal with them might just be enough encouragement for people to make sure that they follow through with their opportunities in the first place. At the same time, people usually have a quite clear idea in mind when considering how one action, or non-action, may influence their lives, and make their decisions based on the momentary importance. Living in Nanwalek requires people to develop a pragmatic approach to life. Local people learn to recognize, from a very early age, that it is futile to try to rush certain things or to get concrete answers regarding the future. People's general approach to life is that only God knows the future, and if something is meant to happen, it will, regardless of all obstacles. To them, worrying about uncertainties does not make sense, as circumstances can and do change from one minute to another; yet things that they have been looking forward to might never happen. Therefore, when trying to work out exact logistical details over the phone regarding my upcoming visits, I usually get the answer: "Don't worry about it, just come on down, we'll figure it out," and mysteriously, things have a tendency of working themselves out. How things work is always mysterious in a sense because nobody can really know what will happen in the future. At the same time, people living with the notion of unexpected developed coping with the "mysterious" unexpected

to a skill that is the ability between recognizing the difference between the need for acting and waiting. One of the most difficult aspects of living in Nanwalek was getting accustomed to long periods of waiting punctuated by rapid outbursts of intense activities, which practice required a great deal of social cooperation and individual flexibility.

Sharing as strategy for coping with the unexpected and mutual reliance on one another within a social network is a crucial part of how readiness is understood in Nanwalek. Therefore it seems that the local conceptualization of solving problems is based on recognizing when something cannot be changed and at the same time always being ready for the unlikely event when it does. The mode of communication that prompts for action or for waiting is vast and versatile, yet it is always clear for those within the network. To act on an opportunity, one needs to know about it first, and acquiring such knowledge is a constant, ongoing process with its own pattern and prescribed norms.

3.2.2. When the Tide Comes Back: Channels of Communication

Being aware of, and ready for, the unexpected alone is not sufficient to cope with the ever-changing circumstances. Being well informed is a key aspect of being able to react to the challenges of life, especially due to the local social milieu that, similarly to the natural landscape, can take a complete 180 degree turn in mere seconds. It is not out of the ordinary to go to bed in a perfectly calm and quiet village and to wake up next morning to a full blown crisis in progress involving most everybody in one way or another. Community wide scandal, mayhem, and outrage can be triggered by a variety of events and reasons, yet it is almost always resolved in a short period of time. Again, people are quick to react, and if the problem is not solved “on-the-spot,” often, it is assumed to just simply go away by losing importance or by solving itself.

At the same time, being a part of the community essentially assumes an active knowledge of “the news,” meaning the latest adventures and misadventures of the village and perhaps relatives residing elsewhere, as such information are passed down through the local grapevine. The velocity and effectiveness of the channels of communication in Nanwalek has amazed me on several occasions, and I was always under the impression

that it had somehow transpired in some mysterious, undetectable way, until one day I observed the mechanism at work.

It was a custom to organize a public dinner in the school for graduation day, to acknowledge the yearly hard work of the schoolchildren and to honor those who successfully concluded their education. On such occasions, as on any other community dinners, people join in a short prayer, led by persons of authority such as priests, deacons, or elders. In that particular school year however, the principal had decided to ban the praying on the basis of school regulations, which were in existence, yet previously completely ignored as not applicable to the school in Nanwalek. As the forbiddance of public prayer was to prevent the possible offence it might cause to non-religious people or to people with other religions, it was never an issue in Nanwalek, where everybody was of one faith. Furthermore, the prayer was considered as a cultural practice in the past, consequently, its abolition had enormously upset local people.

On the day in question I was looking outside of my window to find a number of children walking up on the hill from the direction of the school. Knowing that it was too early for the classes to be over, I went outside and asked around, or as some would say in Nanwalek “I was just plain nosy”. Since everyone seemed to be quite furious, it took me a while to piece together what had happened. Somehow the sub-deacon, Ephim had found out about the principal’s decision regarding the prayer at the graduation dinner, and decided to go down to the school and confront him about it. Again, this was a highly unusual reaction in Sugpiaq culture, which showed the level of outrage the situation evoked. Meanwhile phone calls were made to families with children, and since it was impossible to have the principal understand the importance and meaning of his actions, people decided to pull their children out from school. Starting with Millie, who was working at the store, next door to the school, parents literally went down to the gym, one by one, took their kids, and told them that they were to leave the school and they were never allowed to come back. By the time I made my way down to the store, over half of the children were taken out by angry parents. It seemed that stepping up unanimously was an effective way of communication, as soon afterwards word got around that the principal changed his mind regarding the prayer and he himself decided not to attend. By then, however, most people were too upset to return and participate, and the general celebratory mood was ruined.

This event was quite unfortunate, although it showed the ways in which people quickly attended to a problem in a definite manner, while passing the news and updates around almost simultaneously as they were happening. They also successfully chose a venue of communication that got their point across and reached those who were primarily concerned (parents and deacon). Meanwhile, it also demonstrated how real-life decisions can be made by circulation of news, without the actual necessity of having to physically bring a group of people together. This latter aspect of communication is quite important in Nanwalek, since many times decisions are made in an informal manner through phone calls and individual visits.

As a means of communication today, phones are used on a daily or almost hourly basis and most households are equipped and connected to the not entirely stable phone system. Yet for those, including myself, with no phone connections, daily “news” had to be gathered from various people and places, with active participation and involvement, as it was not as easily “delivered” and available for us. While not having a phone seemed like a disadvantage for some of us, for others, especially Elders, who had visited us from time to time, it was a positive experience. They always expressed their fondness for our house, describing it as calm, peaceful, and relaxing place that reminded them to a bygone era, where daily life was not interrupted by constant phone ringing and noisy TVs. In essence, they thought the house to be more “peaceful” or “cozier” (Briggs 1974: 266) with no amenities instantly and constantly attaching it to the world outside.

Phones are quite a recent addition to the channels of communication in Nanwalek, and not too long ago, everybody was relying on CB radios to keep up with daily affairs. Their advantage and also their disadvantage are both derived from the fact that information transmitted through CBs was heard by everyone in the village; hence they provided no chance for private conversations, but were quite effective for community-wide announcements. Therefore, people’s reliance on social visits as a means of personal communication was more prevalent and going over to a neighbor’s or a particular friend’s house was an active part of almost everyone’s daily life. This practice is especially sorely missed by Elders and the older generations, who grew up and lived most of their lives with visitors constantly dropping by, and who find it difficult to adjust to newer and more impersonal forms of communication. While people often cite noise (caused by TVs, phones, kids and hondas) as one of the main reasons for “running away”

to their cabins at the lakes, they still enjoy visitors and make time for having tea or a cup of coffee whenever somebody stops by. I have heard many people express their disappointment over the declining trend of personal visits saying that “only kids visit nowadays,” and answer their constantly ringing phones with a resentful sigh, as they try to embrace themselves for the next “big news”.

Wenkart Smollett (1989: 128) points out on her study on kinship based network relationships in Bulgaria that phones and their widespread availability actually help people to keep in touch with a larger circle of relatives more frequently. Although phones are effectively used to convey information, discuss problems, express social interest, and especially to make decisions, they do not carry the same meaning of a personal contact that can develop between participants while sharing the same space. My friend, Nina, once pointed out to me that in the older days people used to be physically a lot closer to each other, as for example after Easter service most of the kids and some adults would spend the night in one house together, sleeping on the floor wrapped in blankets and in the morning they would share breakfast and Easter foods. She also told me that back then it was not only normal, but expected to go visit the residents of a house in whichever room they were, almost regardless of whatever they were doing. If an Elder was laying in bed, the visitors had to go and sit on the bed in order to visit, doing otherwise would have been considered very peculiar and inappropriate.

Nowadays, it is mostly the older generations who visit one another on a daily basis, while most of the younger people go to peoples' houses with a specific purpose of delivering goods, asking for something, or complying with social expectations, such as the compulsory stopping by after arriving back to the village or before taking off for a trip. Making phone calls is also an acceptable way of keeping in contact and developed its own etiquette in the village. When answering the phone, people never say their names, and the callers do not state their identity either. Occasionally, the caller might ask who had answered the phone, but people know each other so well, that there is no need for actual identification. For the same reason, answering phones in a house is not restricted to the residents, but could be done by anyone who is around and hears the ringing; in fact, usually it is quite easy to track down people in a neighbor's house or a public place such as store or community hall. When I am staying with my friends Wally and Nina, answering phones can be quite the challenge. Sometimes people ask for my “mom” or

“dad,” mistaking me for their daughter Jolene, so I automatically hand over the receiver for the appropriate person. Other times they do not recognize my voice, or do not know that I am in the village, and instead of directly asking for my identity, they ask to speak to a permanent resident of that household, as it is almost considered discourteous to question adults on the phone for their names, yet it is often done with children.

For the younger generations and young adults the Internet is probably the most important channel of communication, and in addition to Instant Messaging (IM-ing), emails are gaining field with the entire population of the village. Appadurai (1991: 198) states that “more persons throughout the world see their lives through the prisms of the possible lives offered by mass media in all their forms,” and these “fantasies” influence the way people construct their social lives. It is undeniable that catching a glimpse of what people in other cultures do, whether it is in a monastery in Russia, a cooking show in California, or the latest travel show in Australia, people in Nanwalek are affected by what they see. Yet not all of them are influenced by all of these “fantasies” at once, rather, each person seeks out and is drawn to particular subjects that are available through these new modes of communication. Today teenagers in the village would meet up in chat-rooms after school, or spend time IM-ing with four or five different friends and relatives simultaneously, while in physical space they might be only couple houses down from each other. Adults and children alike would leave messages on various networking websites or use instant messaging, posting photos and in general “socializing”. These technologies are used for person-to-person communication, and sometimes as “message boards”. For example, during Easter, people might leave greetings to their friends and family, inquire about relations they have not talked to for a while, and generally keep in touch on an every day basis. Although it is a new kind of social networking, it is still a culturally specific way of maintaining social relationships, only on a different scale (Moore 1996: 7).

In contrast to instant messaging, personal emails are somewhat less frequent; while photo sharing and chain-letters are extremely popular, especially if they contain humor or prayers. It is a new form of sharing; however, sharing news electronically is governed by the same principles as other social interactions within networks. These letters or photos are forwarded to everyone on the mailing list, so it is not uncommon to get the same email from five or six different people at the same time, and these types of

emails can make several rounds around the village before people lose interest in them. Nobody is left out, and everybody must be remembered. I agree with Gershon (2008: 13) that “people’s views of media are entirely shaped by the other media that they use on a regular basis,” likewise to other technical innovation. At the same time, the reason behind preferring one media over the other, or opting to replace one with another, is based on a cultural logic that is shared, and also governs other aspects of social life.

The various ways used for communication can be very different in nature, have a tendency of incorporating new technologies and are used creatively to experiment with new channels of expression. At the same time the basic etiquette and rules that govern the “old-fashioned” personal visiting are re-created and re-interpreted in the new context, while using the new technologies. Both real life and virtual communication allows people a certain level of choice in the intensity of participation, while at the same time, reinforces the notion of readiness that is needed to react to the events of life. These venues are not merely channels of communication; rather they are used to communicate a message in an effective and culturally acceptable way. The reason they are used in the village is because they can be molded to fit the existing system and can comply with the cultural norm while fulfilling social needs. Therefore people are just as careful in their virtual contacts as in their actual ones. According to a local saying, “the tide always comes back,” which, applied to this context, means that saying hurtful things directly to someone, instead of following the appropriate local venues for conveying a message, will eventually backfire on the person, just as anything (bad) taken out by the tide will eventually come back to shore. To avoid such uncomfortable, potentially embarrassing, and not at all acceptable behavior within one’s own social network, one must first know who are the people currently within, in what social capacity, and how do they relate to each other and to one’s own self.

3.3. In “Puusiq’s” House

When people in Nanwalek declare Russian Orthodoxy to be “their religion,” they do not deny the obvious fact that there used to be something before Orthodoxy was brought to Alaska. Instead, they emphasize their view of themselves today as Orthodox Christians, who are Sugpiaq in their ethnic origin. Because there are no Sugpiaq people in

Nanwalek today who are not members of the Orthodox Church, from their point of view, being Sugpiaq and being Orthodox are inseparable concepts within the community. Naturally, people do know that not all Orthodox people are Sugpiaq and that there are Sugpiaq people who are not Orthodox; yet these are only marginal facts, mostly existing in abstractions and not in their immediate social environment. They do not concern themselves with these variations, only if they encounter an actual precedence. They are constantly ready for the unexpected, but they do not waste time on hypothetical theorizations. However, when the question surfaces within the community, people are ready to address it through their own conceptual framework.

Similarly to any other community, Nanwalek is also a home for people who were not born or raised there, who are not Sugpiaq, and not Orthodox Christians either. When an outsider marries into the village, his or her conversion to Orthodoxy is strongly encouraged.⁶⁹ In general, no couple is married in the Church if they are not both baptized and chrismated in the Orthodox Faith, therefore, for the most part, even non-Sugpiaq people living in Nanwalek are mostly Orthodox. It is not that everybody living in Nanwalek today is Orthodox; rather it is that every child born to a Sugpiaq parent from Nanwalek is Orthodox. Even if the parents of a child do not marry in church, and consequently, the non-Sugpiaq parent does not convert to Orthodoxy, the child is still baptized, chrismated, and becomes part of the community, both in religious and social sense. In such cases becoming a member of the Church is not religiously enforced. It would be absolutely inconceivable, incomprehensible, and socially unacceptable not to baptize the child in the Orthodox faith. People do not even consider any other options, because they are not interested in any other options. For them it is not the right thing to do; it is the only thing to do. The community of their own Orthodox Church and the community of their village are one and the same from the local point of view; no full membership can be gained to either without the acceptance to the other.

The integration between Church and community is so strongly communicated within the village, in collective representation and in individual opinions, that facing the realities of church attendance today always comes as a shock to outsiders. Quite often,

⁶⁹ Interfaith marriages are extremely rare and allowed only under special circumstances, as for example it is possible between Orthodoxy and certain Christian denominations based on major theological and dogmatic consensus, and with a special permission from a bishop.

weekday services are attended only by a few people, many of whom are children coming to Church without their parents⁷⁰. Many times outsiders tend to interpret this phenomenon as lack of religious devotion, yet it is quite far from it.

First of all, in Orthodoxy attending church services does not make a person Orthodox, and vice versa, not attending Church services does not make an Orthodox Christians non-Orthodox. In short, being Orthodox does not depend on Church attendance and/or participation. Of course, this does not mean that Orthodox believers are not expected to attend Church services; to the contrary, participating in the Divine Liturgy is an important part of being an Orthodox Christian. It is a time and place where the two aspects (otherworldly and (inner)worldly) of the Church, including the people in attendance, connect.

Secondly, during an Orthodox Church service, it is normal for people to move about, go out and come back in, move from one spot to another, and even to arrive after the liturgy has started (Ware 1997: 270). Roughly the first half hour of the liturgy is preparation, during which worshipers continually arrive to the service; walk up to the front and center of the Church to kiss icons and light candles, after which they might step outside and come back in again. In Nanwalek for example, there are always a number of small children in Church, and it usually takes several adults to keep a child calm and quiet throughout a several hours long service. It is quite normal to pass small children along from one side to another, as for example from the mother standing on the women's side on the left, to the father standing on the men's side on the right. Additionally, people during services are often required to move about, kneel down, bow, move to the center of the church so the priest can circle the church with his incense holder to venerate to icons along the walls, line up for blessings, for communion, or for venerating an icon. People are never stationary during a service.

Lastly, church attendance, particularly in Alaska Native villages, needs to be interpreted through historical contextualization. During the annual cleanup preceding Easter I was helping Pauline, one of the Elders, in organizing the papers stored in the

⁷⁰ Interestingly, it is not only pre-teens and teenagers who come to Church. Virtually any children who are old enough to walk on their own feet come to services as the Church is located in the middle of the village, easily accessible from all of the houses. In fact, small children often want to go to Church. They are excited about putting on their appropriate clothing and going to "Puusiq's House," even if they might fall asleep during the long service.

back of the Church, in the *starosta's* stand. Amongst the miscellaneous books and records she happened across some old confessions lists, the names of people who participated in confession some twenty or so years ago. She remarked to me that they were really long, which indeed they were. A lot of people, almost everyone, who lived in Nanwalek at the time, were listed there. Pauline said that was how it always used to be because they did not have a priest in residence at the time. Whenever clergy came to the village, everybody had confession and communion (if they were allowed to). It was not unusual either to have several couples married on one day and several children baptized and chrismated during the same visit. Today, on the other hand, there are numerous services, often several times a day. Some of them are well attended, while others are not. The services during major holidays are always busy, while weekday services are often emptier. These latter ones are often attended by women and children, and less prominently by men, which corresponds with Kan's (1999: 418) observation of Tlingit Orthodoxy.⁷¹

It is undeniable that different people participate in church services with varying degrees of regularity and intensity in Nanwalek. Yet it does not change the fact that all Sugpiaq people living in the community today have a shared understanding regarding the connection between Russian Orthodoxy and their Sugpiaq identity. Russian Orthodoxy is seminal in the lives of Sugpiaq people in Nanwalek as also it is integrated by the reinterpretation of Orthodoxy through the local conceptual framework. It is not purely Russian Orthodoxy anymore, but it is Sugpiaq Russian Orthodoxy, encompassing local understandings and attained meanings.

3.3.1. "There's Church Today!"

Oleksa (1987) compares the structure of the Orthodox Church to that of a village unit; in both cases everyone has a proper place and knowledge of how to fulfill the expectations of his or her position, opening new dimensions of networking within society. Accordingly, authority in the church, and authority outside of the church do not

⁷¹ In the particular case of Tlingit Orthodoxy, women's greater participation in weekday church services corresponded with their greater cultural conservatism.

contest one another, rather, they are complementary and provide reinforcement for personal social standing.

Everybody in Nanwalek is aware of the importance of the godparent-godchild relationship, as it establishes an irresolvable connection between the parents and the godparents of the child and their extended social networks. To be asked to become godparents for a child is considered as an honor; only those regularly attending church services, participating in confession and partaking communion are considered for this task. Godparents have both religious and social obligations towards their godchildren (Interview with Pauline Kvasnikoff Demas 2006). It is understood that parents and godparents “share” the child and are responsible for his or her behavior, enculturation, and education, all of which concepts are interconnected with Russian Orthodoxy as it is practiced in Nanwalek. Being a godparent to a child is not limited only to the religious sphere (Seiser 2000: 114-115). True, during service children take communion with their godparents, not with their parents, yet when they leave the church, they might go home with their godparent who could “keep” them for an extended period of time, for days, weeks, or even months. One’s godparents’ house is one’s home, with all the pertaining emotional and social associations which one has with one’s own parental home. At the same time, fulfilling the expectations associated with being a godparent is not merely a religious act, but a social one as well. The concept of a “good” godparent in Nanwalek is culturally constructed by locally interpreting Orthodox religious ideas and enacting them in such a way that the concept acquires social significance by the process of internalization. In Nanwalek “good godparents” make sure to teach specific things to their godchildren about Orthodoxy, not only for the sake of the child but also for the salvation of their own souls. This is their duty that they freely chose to take on when they accepted the request to become a godparent, and which they need to constantly fulfill with culturally and religiously appropriate behavior and actions. Therefore, the education of a godchild is not limited to religious behavior in the Church proper; rather it is ongoing and never ending. If godparents are successful (in religious, cultural, and social sense) in fulfilling the culturally specific ideas connected to their duties, their personal social standing in the community increases, as the religious and secular spheres join together in creating one social arena, encompassing all aspects of everyday reality.

The connection between religious and secular as compatible, rather than competing spheres is also described by Kan in regards to Tlingit Orthodoxy (Kan 1999: xxii). Tlingit men often prefer to participate in religious services during festive occasions and major religious holidays, which provide opportunities to gain, display, and emphasize high social status, while the weekday services are mostly attended by women and children of all ages. In general, whether or not there are men present, an Orthodox Church service simply cannot be conducted without singers and readers, consequently all who are present in church are responsible for performing these tasks, which are often accomplished by women during the weekdays.

Reading in church is not an easy task. A considerable portion of matins, vespers, and even the liturgy changes according to the time of the year, the specific holiday that is being celebrated, the exact day in relation to a festal cycle and season, and the type of the service (eg. vespers, liturgy, akathist, hours etc.). It usually takes several years for people to learn all the different parts of these services, which books are needed for reading (three or more for each service), what to read, in which tone (there are 8 tones rotating weekly, according to the feast, and the parts of the service), and in what sequence. Oftentimes, these tasks are performed by deacons or sub-deacons, but in weekday services, the responsibility falls on those who are present.

Prior to living in Nanwalek, I have never paid much attention to the complexity of the services, and I never thought I would participate beyond singing. Yet, after a few months, during one of the services, Natalie, who is always present and performs these tasks, asked me if I wanted to “read”. I had never really learned how to chant with correct intonation, but it was not a busy service, and I was honored that she offered. After that occasion I made conscious efforts to learn about the structure of the services, which brought my attention to the social hierarchy these activities display. Those who wanted to sing and read always stood on the right⁷² side of the church, and Natalie, while following the service along, assigned tasks for all of us around her. She always made sure to include everyone who expressed interest in reading, to assign certain prayers to elders, to rotate the readers around, to match the tasks to physical abilities as for example to avoid tiring out elders, meanwhile following instructions from Father, making sure that the lights

⁷² Which is traditionally the men’s side, but exceptions are made for readers and singers.

were turned on when the royal doors at the center of the icon wall were open and off when the doors were closed, and that all books were located, readings and hymns were at hand and always on schedule. Services are generally quite long, anywhere between one to five hours, yet her organization was not a pre-scheduled activity. It simply could not have been, as she did not know who would come to church or how many of them would want to read. Hers was an “on the spot” solution, making sure to include everyone, and at the same time acknowledge people’s personal status. In this sense, the social aspect of the religious service is approached with the same general idea of flexibility to live with the unexpected that also governs social situations outside of the church.

Men’s tasks, such as serving at the altar, helping with the communion, and carrying religious paraphernalia are also organized on the same principle, and important tasks are assigned amongst those who are present and are regarded to have a high social status. This is why usually Elders, in addition to the starosta, have the honor of holding the *plashthenica* (the Holy Shroud depicting Christ in the grave) during the procession of Great Friday (Good Friday), and icons during the procession of Easter Sunday. Their high social status in the community is acknowledged in the church by the tasks they perform during religious services. In turn, their church participation also reinforces their social status in the community. Because it is a two-way connection, those who are actively participating in service generate social acknowledgment, in a sense social capital, which opens up possibilities for their greater participation within social networks.

The internalization of Orthodoxy in the everyday life of the village is visible and underlined not only by church activities, but also mundane happenstances and ordinary actions people constantly perform. Whether it is making the sign of the cross when entering a home, or before and after eating, wearing crosses around their necks, placing icons in their cars and on their boats, praying before setting out on a journey, having *prosfora* (blessed but not consecrated bread) and holy water in time of sickness or despair, praying in front of the icons before making amends, automatically answering the phone with the church greeting appropriate for the season, or always greeting Father or any other priest with hands placed together asking for a blessing regardless of the time of the day and the location, Orthodoxy is always prominently present, never downplayed and never isolated.

3.3.2. *Sprasnikum!*

Sprasnikum, meaning to celebrate or wishing Happy Holidays, is a Sugtestun word that originated from the Russian expression “*S prazdnikom*” (С Праздником) with the same meaning. It is an expression used in Nanwalek year round in the context of the Orthodox liturgy. People greet one another with *Sprasnikum!* not only to wish a happy holiday (as in feast days), but also to acknowledge the general celebratory nature of the liturgy and taking communion. *Sprasnikum*, in a general sense, is also associated with Christmastime and the Christmas cycle, and it is the traditional greeting to wish Merry Christmas. During this specific time of the year it is used outside of the Church, as a general greeting, as well as within the context of the religious celebration.

On the following pages, I explore the Christmas festal cycle in Nanwalek, or in other words, I describe how people celebrate Christmas. The transformation of “*S prazdnikom*” into “*Sprasnikum*,” is already an indication that the ideas attached to celebration, here specifically the feasts of the Christmas cycle, were not simply taken on by Sugpiaq people. Instead they were conceptualized within their own intellectual framework, deconstructed and reconstructed to express locally meaningful interpretations (Shaw and Stewart 1994: 20). Furthermore, this transformation is not an accomplished fact; rather it is ongoing, constantly “advances under its own momentum” (Fisher 1985: 153). For this reason I am focusing on how all the different kinds of modification to the locally conceptualized social status of individuals experienced during the liminality of sacred time realized and acted out, as well as the ways these understandings influence social status after returning to “normal” or “profane time”.

Although Christmas Eve is celebrated on the 6th of January according to the Orthodox calendar, the preparation for it starts much earlier. The Lenten period preceding Christmas opens on November 28th (St. Philip’s Fast) and it lasts until the first star comes up on the 6th of January. Christmas, self-professedly is the favorite holiday of many in Nanwalek, even to the point that many prefer to have their Christmas lights on year-round, although everybody is quick to acknowledge that Easter, the celebration of Pascha, is the most important holiday of the Church. This does not alter the fact that preparations for Christmas are always full of excitement, which of course is a characteristic that people all over the world share with those living in Nanwalek. What

they do not share however, is the reason behind the general, and day-by-day gradually increasing, feeling of anticipation. Christmas in Nanwalek is not about Santa Claus, gifts, Christmas dinners, and not even about “midnight mass” as a backdrop of justification for the previous three. Rather, it is about Starring and masking; the two activities shared community-wide without which Christmas is not imaginable in Nanwalek.

There are a lot of activities crammed into the Christmas festive cycle, loosely understood, starting from the middle of December to the middle of January. As in many Eastern European and Russian traditions, the day of St. Nicholas (on the 19th of December) is celebrated, who is usually impersonated by an adult bringing small bags of gifts for the children. St Nicholas of Myra, known for his generosity, is the historical person behind the personae of Santa Claus, although the connection is not actively acknowledged in Nanwalek. To be precise, people do know about this association, yet St. Nicholas is regarded as a real person, in a sense their “own,” a patron Saint for many in the village, while Santa Claus as a Western abstraction, an “unreal,” fictitious character. After St. Nicholas’s day people generally start making actual preparations for Christmas, thorough cleaning sometimes even carried out to the extent of repainting the walls, shopping for the multi-day celebration, gathering subsistence foods, cooking and baking, and lavishly decorating the insides and outsides of their homes with elaborate Christmas decorations in every imaginable size, shape, color and form. Almost everybody sets up a Christmas tree, sometimes in time for “American” Christmas, and sometimes just in time for Orthodox Christmas. By the night of January 6th, when the Star (or Stars) is brought from the Church over to the first house after the evening service, people are often quite exhausted but in high spirits.

Nanwalek has two Stars, a bigger and a smaller one. Both of them are built on a wooden frame which is constructed so that it can revolve around the base. A Star can be decorated in a variety of ways, as long as only light, bright colors are used. It is usually done by a couple of adults, men or women, who voluntarily go to the Church and take off last year’s decoration to create a brand new one. Decorating the Stars is also a task that is performed within the particular cultural context. Using bright colors is in accordance with the festive occasion of Christmas, yet people need to do with what is available at that particular time. In the past, as well as currently, people often use white crepe paper, tinfoil, bright materials, especially with metallic woven in a festive pattern, lace, and

Christmas decorations. In this sense it is created as a bricolage; an artistic expression of the decorator, as well as an articulation of people's aesthetic ideas. The decoration is always changing, but the underlying idea is always the same; it is created based on the shared understanding of what people perceive as beautification appropriate for the celebration of Christmas. In this fashion people cover the Star(s) with a light colored material, accentuate the points with bright foils, and adorn the center containing an icon of the Nativity (the Mother of God and the Newborn Christ) with shimmering decorations.

Starring continues for three days, and on the second day of Christmas and the third day of Starring (January 8th), Masking takes place for the first time in that year. Masking goes on until the 17th of January with a one-day break on the 14th, which is reserved for the performance of *Nuuwikuutaq*, a New Year's play⁷³. On the night of the 17th Masking ends, as the next day brings the feast of Theophany (the Eve of Theophany) which is a strictly religious holiday celebrating Christ's baptism, and also signals the end of the Christmas cycle. Even from this short overview of the festal cycle it is clear that there are a multitude of interconnected events and activities that express the local conceptualization of Christmas, yet for the purposes of exploring the notion of social networks in, essentially, sacred time I am focusing predominantly on Starring, Masking and New Year's.

I was standing in my door peering out towards the side of the hill filled with houses. I thought I caught a glimpse of some people cutting across the back yard of Priscilla's and Jeff's heading towards Kathy's house. I wanted to make quite sure that the Star was going up on the road towards Ephim's and Alma's, which would have meant that it would come back down towards the other end of village before it came to our house. That would have given my husband and me about three hours of waiting, in which case I was determined to run out for a short visit followed up by an hour nap, so as to make up for the sleep we lost over feverish cleaning and cooking the previous night.

⁷³ *Núwikútaq* is "unique to the communities of Nanwalek and Port Graham. People from Kodiak remember that a similar but much less elaborate celebration used to be held on Russian New Year" (Crowell and Steffian and Pullar 2001: 218).

Although we were mostly done with the renovation of the house, we still needed to put away some building material and tools, decorate for Christmas, reinforce our rickety stairs, fill up our water tank and cook my special fishballs (based on Hungarian meatballs adapted to the locally available fish) and Christmas strudels for the people who followed the Star.

The previous day, on the first night of Starring, I followed along. After vespers in the Church, we followed the Star to Wally's and Nina's, as the Star always starts out at the chief's house. We did not "take the Star" and we did not "get ahead of the Star" as we were walking up the hill; we literally followed. As my friend, Sperry explained to me, it is important to observe this tradition, because following the Star from house to house is, in a sense, the enactment of the three wise men following the Star to Bethlehem. Therefore the meaning conveyed by the act of Starring is having Christ coming to people's home and being received in full reverence. This ideology is reinforced by the tradition that the Star visits only certain houses on the first night: those with the newborn babies of that year.

It is not unusual to have only a handful of singers on the first night, which was the case during my stay as well. This of course does not mean that proper preparations can be neglected. As people say in Nanwalek, "you just never know if it will be a few (meaning 6-7) or a whole bunch (meaning 30 or more people)". For this reason it is important to provide plenty of refreshments just as much as to have the house scrubbed and cleaned to perfection for the Star, and essentially for the arrival of the Newborn Christ. As Starring goes on for three days - on all of which days every single house of the community is visited - preparation is a constantly ongoing and not at all trifling activity.

People not only clean and decorate their own houses, but they also have social obligations toward others in their networks. Preteens and teenagers are made to help out with tasks, and they can also be dispatched to one of their relative's place who might need help. Young adults help their parents and Elders to prepare before they care for their own homes. Hierarchy within social networks become visible through the activities preceding Starring: in giving and taking orders, providing and asking for help, and in the time and effort invested in preparation of particular homes. Having high social status requires people to outfit their houses with lavish decorations and plentiful refreshment. Yet, not only those living in the house contribute to this achievement, but everybody

associated with that particular social network participate in some ways (cleaning, cooking, hanging up ornaments, getting firewood before the feast sets in etc.). The responsibility of fulfilling the social obligations connected to a particular status is still that of the individual's, as he or she is to organize and oversee the preparations, but the actual work is contributed by everyone within the network in a declining order.⁷⁴

On the second day all of the houses are included in Starring, but one can never know the exact time of its arrival. There are general ideas on the routes people can take in Starring, but no precise planning or order. It largely depends on the people in the singing group, and they often follow their own logic in their design. Sometimes, especially nowadays when there are over 40 houses in the community, both Stars are brought out with two separate groups of singers circulating in the village, which makes completing the daily rounds somewhat faster. Perhaps one of them is led by a priest and another is by a deacon, and while they usually try to avoid direct meeting of the Stars, when it happens, they need to be positioned in a way that they face each other until they depart on separate ways. Singers (who are the people following along) can shift from one group to the other, can follow only for a short period of time, or go to all the houses if they wish so. For all these reasons Starring, similarly to many other social activities in the village, is balanced on the notions of acting and waiting, as it creates a sense a suspense and anticipation which is combined with happiness and joy, together creating a "Christmas spirit" shared by all in Nanwalek.

On the first day when the Star came to our house, I did not expect so many people to follow. We did not have a phone, so we did not get the constant updates people usually use to "track" the movement of the Star and to alert one another for its imminent arrival. After spending most of the day with waiting, we saw the Star coming up on the hill, and we had just enough time to pull all the food out from the fridge, turn all the lights off and light our make-shift *laampaataq* (oil lamp) in front of our *Puusiq* (icons). We waited in the dark and in quiet. Then we heard the door open and one of the teenage boys usually serving at the altar came in with the Star and stood under the *Puusiq* facing towards us while the crowd filed in through the door. We stood crammed shoulder to

⁷⁴ Meaning that teenagers for example might be sent from their grandparents' house, given a priority in getting ready, to one of their uncle's or aunt's place to help out before they return home.

shoulder, and Father started to sing the first of three *kolyadi*⁷⁵ (Christmas songs), everybody joining in as he went along.

It was an emotional moment. Elders and young ones, friends and mere acquaintances, all came to our house to celebrate Christmas with us, and to them there seemed to be nothing exceptional about it. We were treated as any other family in the community. The same Christmas songs, passed down from generation to generation only by listening to them during Starring, were sung in front of our icons, after which Father followed up with the traditional blessing mentioning the inhabitants of the house by name, and everybody joining in the three times repeated “Many Years”. The latter, reserved for festive occasions, wishing that God grant many years to come to those being celebrated, is usually done in Russian, in English, and in Sugtestun in this order. Finally, all singers lined up and took turns in exchanging kisses with my husband and me and greeting us with “*Sprashnikum!*” and wishing us Merry Christmas. Before the Star went on to the next house, everybody took a five minute break for sampling the refreshments we had prepared.

Knowing that my waiting was over for that day I joined the singers and followed the Star for the rest of the evening. There were houses in the village where I went for the very first time, and I exchanged kisses and Christmas greetings with people I had exchanged only a few words with before. Nevertheless, it felt right, because it was impossible not to feel the emotional and spiritual connectedness of the community. Every door was open, all cheeks or lips were kissed, all the foods shared, all families blessed, and every single person was wished a merry Christmas a dizzying number of times. It was a feeling of *communitas*; we were all a part of this experience. True, we were not all equal in the sense of social ranking, as there were still certain positions, “ritual elders” (Turner 1969: 96)⁷⁶, singled out during the course of events (such as chief, priest,

⁷⁵ The singing of *kolyadi* was introduced to Alaska by Father Iakov Korchinskii in 1905 (Oleksa 1993: 188). Sometimes more than three *kolyadi* are sung, and in the past, with less houses to cover, singing used to be much longer.

⁷⁶ Turner describes *communitas* as the condition “which emerges recognizably in the liminal period, is of society as an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated *comitatus*, community, or even communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the “ritual elders” (Turner 1969: 96). By this definition Turner acknowledges the existence of “rudimentary” social differentiation, which is carried over from the “normal,” or “profane” sphere of society. I apply the notion of *communitas* to this particular situation with the understandings of some “carried over” social status.

deacon), but the general feeling of sharing the moment was overpowering, and it was natural for everyone to feel a sense of inclusion and respect, as a servant of God, a member of the Church, and a member of the community. There was no division between social and secular spheres, and in this sense it was a “sacred time” (Leach 1961: 134)⁷⁷. Nobody cared that by the time the Star left the last house it was well past two o’clock in the morning and all mundane worries ceased to matter for the three days of Starring. The people, as members of the community of Nanwalek, together focused on one single matter as whole: on celebrating Christmas in their own way.

After Starring is completed on the third day Maskalating takes over, which creates a different kind of sense of timelessness. During *Maskalataq*, time is not measured in hours and not even in days in a strict sense. For two weeks there are only nights, spent in the community hall with dancing and watching, and days, mostly spent with sleeping and resting. The village and its people take on an alternate reality in which they seem to exist apart from the rest of the world. So much apart in fact, that during the eruptions of St. Augustine volcano, and a possibility of a subsequent tidal wave at the middle of the Christmas cycle, people assessed their situation and went on with their celebration. Rhoda, taking pictures of the ash fall, which made it into various news media, was also quoted in an interview in the Anchorage Daily News: “We’ll continue having the New Year whether we have to run up the hill and take the celebration with us” (Rhoda Moonin in Lee 2006).

It is not easy to interrupt sacred time, moreover, it is simply not safe (Van Gennep 1960: 184). Liminality, the “betwixt and between” (Turner 1967: 93, 1969: 95), by definition is a dangerous phase where the sacred dominates reality, opening the door for eventualities that could not happen in normal, “profane time”. One cannot just walk away from a ritual in mid-process, as it creates danger by its “uncleanness” (Douglas 1966) and there is always the promise of plenty and gruesome repercussions in order to prevent such occurrences. The condition of liminality is “of ambiguity and paradox, a confusion of all the customary categories” (Turner 1967: 97), which is continuously conveyed through the practice of Maskalating as an underlying concept.

⁷⁷ Meaning “phase B” of Leach’s pattern on the total flow of time. He regards Phase B as “the marginal state [where] the moral person is in sacred condition, a kind of suspended animation [and where] ordinary social time has stopped” (Leach 1961: 134).

The *Maskalataq* is a real “thing,” not a persona and not a person; it is very tall, dressed in rags, does not talk and is said to live in the volcanoes. Actually, there are several of *Maskalataq* (in plural *Maskalatat*) and they are linked specifically to the time of masking (January 8th-17th), when they come to the village to dance⁷⁸. In a sense, *Maskalataq*, the real one, is a local conceptualization of something evil, something without a soul, something not human. Yet, during masking (Maskalating) the dancers enact this creature by assuming a persona that is associated with the *Maskalataq*.

The *Maskalataq* is also referred to the personification of the servants of King Herod, who were sent out to look for the newborn Christ, killing all male children under the age of two (Matthew 2:16). In this regard Maskalating is similar to many other carnivalesque traditions where a certain state is reversed, in this case human and non-human, as well as in a sense of acting out the Biblical story of Christ’s birth.⁷⁹ The carnivalistic aspect of masking is also recognizable in the humor, and the general association of “fun,” during the performance, and it’s a community-wide event bringing together of young and old alike. Older people and Elders are often known to be avid maskers, and young ones (children especially after New Year’s) are always encouraged to dance.

The origin of masking is twofold. It has clear Russian elements, such as the music played⁸⁰, the timing of the dance during Christmas, and the act of masked dancing in itself. On the other hand, it also has Sugpiaq associations, as during the traditional winter festivities people gathered in the ceremonial house where masked dancers, representing various spirits, performed ceremonies. Gavriil Davydov witnessed such a ceremony in 1803 on Kodiak Island and in his description he mentioned masked dancers representing ‘evil spirits’, carrying charms, whistles and paddles (Davydov 1977: 109).

The extreme popularity of dancing, and its current legitimate re-interpretation as “dancing for fun,” comes from the fact that it provides a great deal of spontaneity for dancers in their performance and for the audience to enjoy. One can never know how

⁷⁸ As also to take a human with them occasionally to turn the person into a *Maskalataq*.

⁷⁹ Similarly to medieval mumming or church decorations with scenes from the Bible and from the lives of Saints. Also, Christmas plays, caroling, or the combination of the two, are popular in other parts of the world as well, where Eastern Christianity is the dominant or a well-represented religion.

⁸⁰ The guitars used by the musicians “need to be tuned in the Russian way,” to the key of G (Csoba DeHass 2007: 212).

many dancers will come that particular night, whom they will be, how they will dance, how many people will show up to watch, and how long it will last. The notion of uncertainty is an active part of the liminal period, in which the people of the village just as easily encounter a real *Maskalataq* as a dancer who assumes the persona.

The transformation of the dancers from their own human self to *Maskalataq* transpires in private homes; they gather and dress in miss-matched clothes, put on masks made out of pillow cases and sheets, and take extreme care to cover their entire bodies in the process. They should not and cannot be recognized.⁸¹ In fact, the concealment is so thorough, that there is always the chance of a “real one” invading their group; therefore people are advised to take precautions. During this time of the year, it is not wise to be outside in the dark, and before heading down to the community hall, where masking takes place, and upon arrival, people are advised to count their numbers and hold hands so that a real *Maskalataq* cannot join them along the way.

On the first night of masking I made my way over to the community hall joining the throng of people gathering around. The bleachers of the community hall were already full of excited people, the band in the corner was tuning up, and general anticipation filled the air. I, like many younger children just old enough to have some kind of memories of last year’s masking, had some vague ideas what to expect. I knew that on the first day there would be only one dancer at a time on the floor until midnight, after which all the dancers would be allowed to come in together. Soon, the news of some *Maskalatat* being spotted on the road rippled down through the audience to where I was sitting in the middle of the room, and as the band started up, we saw a figure coming through the door, briefly nodding “its” head to the left and right. And then the first *Maskalataq* started to dance.

The tempo of masking music is rhythmic, repetitious, and can be slowed down or speeded up for added drama. All dancers have their own style of movements, often exaggerated for the benefit of the audience, incorporating short skits or acts of comedy, and sometimes even impromptu choreographed dancing. The continuous interaction with

⁸¹ Of course, from general physical appearance, and from the style of dancing, people often know who is behind a mask, even though dancers often swap clothes during the intermissions to confuse the watchers.

the watchers and the band is all achieved by only dance and movements, enhancing the maskers' humorous appearance, which is often overstated to the point of grotesque.

The first dancer donning a white mask, long, billowy skirt and a bright pink vest circled the floor counterclockwise in a slow, almost subdued dance then disappeared through the door to be immediately replaced the second one, who moved with more animation, encouraged along by the audience's whistles and shouts. After the fourth dancer the music ended and a short intermission ensued. The smaller children immediately took over the floor. They had no masks or music, but they perfectly replicated the maskers' performance. Adults walked about; some chatted, some went outside to smoke (along with the maskers), and some sold and bought refreshments of various kinds. About fifteen minutes later the crowd settled down again, and the musicians started to play. The evening of masking continued on with the alternation of dancing and resting, acting and waiting, into the wee hours of the night.

Highly entertaining dancing, of course, is always greatly enjoyed, and some are better at it and more enthusiastic than others. Despite the secrecy by assuming the persona of the *Maskalataq*, dancers, for their participation, accumulate respect and appreciation. Dancing, in general, is highly encouraged. It is regarded as a part of tradition that needs to be carried on, and at one point or another, everybody becomes a dancer. Their temporary exclusion from society, marked by their inability to take communion in Church as they have been acting the part of the *Maskalataq*, creates solidarity with the knowledge that they all will be re-incorporated to their "normal" (human) state together at the end of the masking season.

Although masking is thoroughly enjoyed, its repetition night after night wears people out. Just when people start feeling tired out by masking, the time for the New Year's play comes along, throwing the community into an additional frenzy of preparation and planning. *Nuuwikuutaq*⁸², or New Year's, is a musical drama displaying all "classic" elements of a stylized enactment of a cyclical, seasonal, renewal rite (Van Gennep 1960: 178-180). It is, yet again, a combination of Russian and Sugpiaq cultural concepts and traditions⁸³, which today is considered as one of the most descriptive

⁸² From the Russian *Novij God* (Personal Communication with Sperry Ash 2004).

⁸³ Recently, the Sugpiaq tradition of New Year's play has been compared to the Ukrainian tradition of Malanka (performed on the 13th of January) by Craig Mishler (2009). In Nanwalek,

articulation of Sugpiaq identity.⁸⁴ It is not difficult to realize the Russian elements; the very concept of a new year, the music played during performance, and the costumes of the dancers. This latter is especially apparent. The twelve “maidens,” representing the twelve months, are garbed in white, or bright colored dresses, their “youth” heavily emphasized with makeup under the veils covering their faces. The New Year, always played by a tall, young man is dressed in white shirt and pants altered with beads and decorations to resemble a stylized expression of a Hussar’s uniform, complete with a tall hat. The MP, or military police, is also dressed in white, the ultimate coloring of “the good guy”. The Old Year’s clothing is dark and dingy. It is usually impersonated by a shorter man to draw attention to the character’s advanced age, supplemented with a generous hump on his back and a stick in his hand. Finally, the “old birds” or “old ladies,” the three remaining wives of the Old Year are donning dark colored mismatched clothing, mostly of a skirt of some sort, and their ominous reticule in their hands. They are the most entertaining actors of the play, the only ones allowed to talk (until recently only in Sugtestun), and their role is to create havoc and disarray, causing laughs in their wake. In addition to the strong Russian influence, Sugpiaq elements are also present: a paddle carried by the New Year, a whistle deliberately applied by the MP, or the general covering of faces, either by masks or veils, of all dancers⁸⁵ to mention the most obvious.

The general layout of the play is divided into twelve acts; hence it is the symbolic enactment of a year’s time. The acts, or “rounds,” are divided by short breaks, and each round gradually picks up pace along the way. While the first rounds are relatively calm, and controlled, the last three ones are fast and impulsive. Each round starts with the New Year, The MP, and the Months entering the community hall, one-by-one, briefly bowing their heads and circling the room counterclockwise, to the rhythm of the music. The Old Year comes in after the first turn around the room is completed, and the Old Ladies come in with him or after him whenever they please in a manner whatever they choose. They

Nuuwikuutaq is performed on the night of the 14th, as the night of the 13th, the actual change from old to new year is reserved for a short service in the Church.

⁸⁴ The New Year’s play has been popular in all villages of the four Sugpiaq Alutiiq regions, although it has experienced a sharp decline in the past decades. Nanwalek is one of the last villages where it is performed with a village-wide participation. Also, in the past years, there is a multi-village staging of the play in Anchorage, usually organized several weeks after Teophany, but still before the onset of Great Lent.

⁸⁵ So the Devil would not scratch them (Personal Communication with Sperry Ash 2006).

seek attention, and laughs, pester the New Year and the months in their jealousy of their youth, and protect the Old Year from the New Year⁸⁶. The Old Ladies also harass the audience. They are played by men, because towards the last rounds play-acting can, and does, get pretty rough. Capitalizing on their role as an old women played by men, a large source of their comedy comes from their lewd suggestions offered to the men in the audience, their exaggerated performance of femininity, and in their alternation between playing a blushing bride and the world wise wife of the Old Year. Their play is, of course, a series of role reversals considerably enhancing the carnivalistic atmosphere. They quarrel, they fight, they attack, they mope, and they refuse to leave the hall at the end of the round hiding amongst the spectators, making the New Year and the MP forcibly remove them one-by-one, in a prolonged, humoresque, and quite physical fashion. Bashes, gashes, and minor injuries are quite common, explaining the precaution to let women only play the part of the months, protected and watched over by the New Year.

The dance of the Months at the beginning of the play is slow, their row is organized, they are lined up straight as they circle the hall and take turns dancing with the Old Year, as a way of saying goodbye. In the last three rounds however, the Months are huddled together, in constant alert, watching for the rest of the players, ready to get out of their way on a moment's notice. The music is fast, the audience is squeezed up on the bleachers against the walls, the Months are practically jogging around the hall, the New Year's paddle falls harder on the Old Year's hump, the Old Ladies screech louder and attack faster, and the MP zigzags around in his ineffectiveness of keeping the order. When the clock turns to midnight, the music abruptly stops, and all the actors rush outside for the last time. In the suddenly ensuing quiet a rifle shot is fired; the Old Year has gone, and the New Year is born in full power. The dancers slowly walk back in, taking their masks and veils off, lining up facing the icons on the wall of the community hall. Everybody stands up and follows Father in a prayer and subsequent blessing. The musicians start up again in a waltz, supplying the music for the forgiveness dance. It commences with the dance between the men who played the Old and New Years, switching over to the other dancers after a few turns. It was just a play, no hard feelings.

⁸⁶ During the rounds the Months also protect the Old Year, because he is still in power, and he still has authority over the New Year.

Slowly the audience joins in, everybody who had any arguments, quarrels, or held grudge against one another come together in the forgiveness dance. All is forgiven.

Nuuwikuutaq is a ritual within the general ritual of the Christmas cycle, with clear stages of separation, liminality, and incorporation (aggregation) (Van Gennep 1960). The actors dress for the play, assume a persona, and again, remove it at the end with the removal of their masks. They are incorporated in their own person through praying and the forgiveness dance, and the danger associated with their liminal⁸⁷ status disappears. It ushers in the New Year legitimating it in the process, bonding together all who witness it. Yet, it does not conclude the Christmas cycle, or masking, as it continues on the next night until Theophany. Even so, after the New Year's play, masking assumes a lighter tone. Children are allowed to mask, skin can be shown, there are elaborate skits performed, and it is easy to recognize most of the dancers despite their masks.

On the night of the 17th, before the forefeast of Theophany sets in, everybody who danced gathers in the community hall for a final masking event. This time all the maskers circle around, their faces covered, their arms flapping around their body as they are catching their shadows. Should they fail to do so, they are predicted to die in the months to come. They are all waiting for midnight, and when it arrives, the music stops and the dancers tear their masks off and throw them in the middle of the hall in a pile. Later on the masks are burned along with the clothes used for masking, as a first step towards reintegration into the society of the community. The dancers are also required to clean themselves, some, according to tradition, run down to the beach straight from the community hall and take a dip in the freezing ocean. Others prefer a hot banya or shower. Regardless of the means, the ends are the same for everyone: by cleansing they take another step towards disassociation from the *Maskalataq*. As a final stage of reincorporation, dancers attend the Theophany service in the Church and kneel down several times (between 50 and 300) incessantly asking for forgiveness, after which they are considered to be fully themselves, free of any liminal association.

⁸⁷ For example, the doors always need to be kept cleared during rounds, because if someone blocks the exits and stands in the way of the dancers running out, that the person is believed to die in the upcoming year. It interferes with the ritual, blocks the inevitable flow of time, and as such is confronted with the force emanating from the phase of liminality, while literally being, on the threshold, betwixt and between.

The opening and closing of the Christmas cycle is clearly connected to the Church, as it starts and ends with a religious service. Yet what happens in between has only a loose association. Orthodoxy is always present and never completely removed from masking and the New Year's play, but its actual participation in these traditions can be revealed only through the ritual process. Outsiders are often astounded to see the close connection between the practice of Masking and Orthodoxy Christianity, sometimes even going as far as questioning the legitimacy of this connection. From their vantage point, masking is juxtapositioned against Christianity, while in reality they are embedded in one another. This idea is not new, and certainly cannot be regarded as such from the Church's perspective. Idiosyncratic or not, masking traditions, carnivals, festivals and various celebrations incorporating local cultural elements are practiced all over the world, including the village of Nanwalek. A good portion of the Christmas activities in fact came from Russia, along with the same people who brought Orthodoxy to this part of the world.⁸⁸ All these celebrations, in Russia, in Ukraine, in other parts of Europe, within Orthodoxy and in other Christian traditions, are all not merely tolerated, but in fact incorporated as a part of the local religious concept, because in the end, they actually re-enforce that particular Christian religion (Turner 1969: 129). It is the Church on whom people rely for incorporation to the "normal" social structure after the celebration has ended, and the role-reversal, and even the "statusless" condition of *communitas*, occurring in the liminal period, accentuates the significance of social status in "profane time".

During the Christmas festival cycle in Nanwalek, Starring, Masking, the New Year's play, and the celebration of corresponding Church holidays are all part of a larger cultural construction, a local conceptualization of an analogy between the Sugpiaq and the Orthodox understandings of social structure, and the attainment of power and authority. Consequently, rituals, such as the ones I described above, simultaneously strengthen religious and secular social structure, which in fact is integrated to the point of creating a new social-cultural reality in which the Sugpiaq people of Nanwalek exist. At the same time, this reality is very different from the bureaucratic (or rational, or legal)

⁸⁸ Whom Black (2004: 230) describes as "sinners, to be sure, but unbelievers they were not."

understanding of authority, which has no potential of ever developing such an intimate connection, exactly because it is created on the basis of “rationality”.

3.4. “Who’s Your Mom?”

One day early in my fieldwork, I was filling up my water containers from the tap on the side of the community hall right after Church ended on a Sunday morning. The square had already emptied out, so when I heard a honda struggling to climb up towards the square, I looked up to wave hello. The machine was emitting a roaring noise suggesting that its rider, one of the village Elders, was flooring the gas while still in first gear, which later I learned was his habit, and came to an abrupt halt in front of the stairs. He gave me an appraising look and told me that he had seen me in Church, to which I conceded. I was somewhat apprehensive of this conversation, as I knew he would not have stopped to talk to me unless he had a specific reason. While it was expected and normal to exchange greetings, as an Elder and as a man he just simply had nothing to talk to me about.

Except in this case he had: he wanted to know who my mom was. Simple as the question may seem, I was having serious difficulties answering it. Sure, I knew who my mother was, but providing her name would have been little help for him to explain my identity. By then I realized that he believed me to be a distant, and yet unknown, relation. I was obviously staying in Nanwalek and was participating in Church services, moreover I knew how to behave in the Church and was even still wearing the appropriate “church clothing” of a married woman: a long skirt and a scarf covering my hair. From his point of view, I could have been married to someone local, or visiting from another village. So I decided to tell him that my mom was in Europe, and that my husband and I were visiting for a while staying in the house on the other side of the square. I also mentioned several of the families with whom I had a good relationship with, as to indicate how do I fit into the larger picture, and as a compromise for my inadequate explanation of my family relations. As he seemed to be satisfied by this information he took off, and on later occasions he even “indulged” me or my husband in some teasing or joking – an unmistakable sign of positive social acknowledgment.

With so many distant, perhaps previously unknown relatives around, keeping every relation in mind is indeed a formidable task. It requires a detailed knowledge of not only one's own age group, but also several generations of descendants. Fortunately, people developed an almost foolproof method that allows the immediate identification of any of the myriad children running around, or at times, some of the unfamiliar adults, by simply asking who their mom is. It is simple enough, and in the local context it makes more sense to ask children to provide their mother's name than their own full name for several reasons. First of all, adults, and especially Elders, are more likely to have an extensive knowledge of their own and their relatives' kinship ties, and therefore will certainly know someone who is old enough to be a mother. Secondly, the child might have a family name that is either very common in the village, and would not necessarily single him or her out as a descendent of one particular family, or perhaps it is a name of a non-Native father, or derives from the name of a single mother. The possibilities are endless, therefore it is considered safer and less complicated to identify people by their mothers, their closest and most certain connections.

Knowing one's own position within an established system of networks is one of the major organizing factors in people's social relationships. In order to be able to participate in the complex web of social interactions, people need to establish and clarify their level of interconnectedness, which then allows them to identify one another within the system and outlines their appropriate behaviors. In establishing a level of connectedness and the consequent social behavior people do not solely rely on biological attributes. Similarly to the Pulapese, it is not important who was born, in this case Sugpiaq, and who was not (Flinn 1992: 5); rather, people look at other factors, such as personal behavior, fulfillment of obligations to friends or to newly acquired "kin," and in general participation in the maintenance of social networks.

3.4.1. In the Family

In Nanwalek, as in other small communities, people share not only kinship relations, but also have an extensive social network. These two phenomena are not completely equated with each other, and they can involve different kinds of connections. A person can be a kin and not be in one's network, and other people in the network might

not be kin-relations initially, but slowly progress towards kin-like status. Many times I have heard the saying “We are all related here. If you are not related by blood, you are related by living here,” and in many aspects people make such statements seriously. Naturally, being like family does not necessarily equate with “being family,” although the two concepts are very close in meaning. Biological connectedness is not always a prerequisite to being treated like family, as the concept does not only entail privileges and benefits, but also carries serious duties and responsibilities. People have the responsibility to provide food, shelter, material goods, including monetary resources, physical work and help without directly being asked to do so, and without previous notification, and individual behavior within a social network is just as important in establishing kinship ties as biological relatedness. The idea of kinship entails pragmatic and strategic choices (Schweitzer 2000) and people often make their selection on who is considered as kin on an individual basis. They can choose to activate or create a kinship tie based on momentary togetherness within a social landscape, and downplay others when they find them unsatisfactory (Rosaldo 1980: 183). The idea of who is regarded as kin is extremely fluid and flexible, constantly changing and never a pre-set category. In Nanwalek, kinship undoubtedly can be defined as “a cultural reservoir from which individuals draw items they can use to define and construct everyday social interaction” (Nuttall 2000: 34), as it is a foundation for creating social networks (Damas 1963, 1964, 1968).

It is generally acknowledged that kinship is not confined by biological relatedness and it is the most important organizing principle of social life (Nuttall 2000: 39), but how it really works in the formulation of social groups and networks is debated. On the one hand, Guemple (1965, 1972) draws attention to the flexibility that is present in the idea of kinship, claiming it to have a leveling effect on social relations. Burch (1975), on the other hand, points out that kinship does not work as a leveler in societies which are based on social ranking and have hierarchical structures, exactly because the way people structure their kin relations also prescribes their behavior towards one another. Historically, Sugpiaq society has been described as ranked socially, and even currently it is quite prevalent in Nanwalek. Social ranking constantly influences the way people think about their kin, they constantly re-evaluate the closeness of the relationships, and in general their inclusion or exclusion in one’s own network. By doing so, they also

modify and re-define their behaviors towards individuals and networks and reconsider their own positions within the community. Therefore, the constant re-conceptualization of kinship relations allow people to cultivate extensive social networks that are constantly shifting, yet provide a conduit for people in constructing and maintaining their community.

Naturally, this process is only viable if individuals have a clear grasp of their own role in it, and for this reason, the actors all need to be able to assess their rights and responsibilities in a given situation based on their status and network relations and act in manner that is satisfactory for all parties involved. Failure to do so has long-term consequences and can result in alienation from their social networks. Concurrently, people also need to be prepared to accept such help provided by others and to understand the exchange that is involved in the interaction, because knowing when and how to receive is just as much a part of activating the coping mechanism social networks provide as knowing how to give. I was reminded of this latter attribute of kinship after I had left the field.

When I moved back to Fairbanks I kept in touch weekly with some of the families in Nanwalek, and when Christmas came I intended to go back for a few days to celebrate. My plans however fell through as I did not have the resources to travel. When I told that to my friends in Nanwalek via instant messaging, they realized that my husband and I were having financial difficulties, as people often travel with minimal monetary resources with the attitude of “hoping for the best”. Wally and Nina immediately offered to wire us some money, a couple hundred dollars, to help us tide over the difficult times. We were very touched, but declined the offer, as we knew it was probably a large portion of the money they had left after the preparations for the lengthy Christmas festivities, and assured them that we had enough money to get by. Their response was very illustrative of the local, perhaps Sugpiaq, social norms governing the mechanisms of social networks; they told us not to be too proud to accept help or to ask for it when we need it, which would have put a strain on our relationship. Even though we did not take the money offered to us, our friends regarded us as family; with the responsibilities of family members who supposed to know when and how to ask for help, and what the consequences would be if we failed to act according to the established etiquette. In a

social network no one can relax and enjoy him or herself knowing that others might be going without basic provisions. Making sure that everybody has enough food and firewood is a fundamental concern, and in cases when the parties are separated in space and immediate need arises, monetary assistance is provided as well. The scale of the responsibilities vary greatly from situation to situation, and while in some instances people have the right, and option, to decline requests directed to them, other requests involve the entire village and need to be acted upon accordingly. In this sense behavior really can convert strangers to kin (Flinn 1992: 6) and people are defined by their social relations within a specific social context.

It is clear that people can reduce their standing and status in the community by responding to consecutive requests without any returned favors, or by engaging in activities that they have a right to refuse, or avoid. Therefore it is also important to realize what the privileges are that derive from different standings, and that privileges are actual indicators of the nature of the relationship between individuals and between the individual and the community. For example, if an adult woman needs help with food preparation, she can request help from her daughters, nieces, granddaughters, or younger sisters. She will choose to call on specific persons depending on who is available at the time, the kind of task that needs to be completed, and the nature of the relationship between herself and those being asked to help. If, for example, it is mostly teenage girls who are “ordered to help” their aunt out with a task, the aunt would not ask her adult female friends, or sisters to participate alongside the teenagers. Because teenagers’ social status is, in general, lower than that of adults, they can be given direct orders. Adults, by their higher social status are not required to join a group of teenagers and help them with their work. In fact, if they do so, or participate beyond supervising and advising, they are not behaving as an adult. Failing to behave according to one’s social standing reduces one’s social status, because others have no choice but to treat people according to their behavior.

While kinship is symbolic and through it people find an expression of their social worlds (Nuttall 1992:93) it is also very specific in guiding actors towards the contextually appropriate behavior that can be perceived only from within the situation. Additionally, it creates levels of interconnected meanings in which individual actions make sense, and organized on the basis of these symbolic expressions.

At one point during my fieldwork I was prowling the aisles in the local store looking for Splenda, and lamenting to those passing by on the meagerness of the available selection. There was nothing out of the ordinary with my behavior, as it was a favorite pass-time activity of most in the village, and a well grounded one as well, since by then the last shipment of goods was, again, overdue. To my surprise however, one of the ladies I exchanged complaints with offered me a full bag of sweetener, which was a costly ingredient even when purchased in town, not to mention its value in the village. She claimed that she had no use for it, and that I was welcome to it, in fact she assured me that she would drop it off at my place later that day, which she ended up doing. Previously I did not have much social exchange with this family or the lady, so her reaction was a pleasant surprise. Later on I realized that I accidentally followed a pattern of behavior that is used to express genuine need, and that is rarely ignored by those who are in the position to help. By offering and giving me her sweetener she also acknowledged me as someone in her familiar circle and as an equal, who would henceforth be connected to her by some means, specifically by a favor. Favors of course need to be returned, and while her act was selfless, it was carried out within a certain context.

Mary Douglas remarked that “a gift that does nothing to enhance solidarity is a contradiction” (Douglas 1990: vii), because the “whole idea of a free gift is based on a misunderstanding”. In an exchange, where an explicit emphasis is placed on the unnecessary, and perhaps even an unwelcome reception, of a return gift, there can be no ties created between the participants. According to Mauss one of the major characteristic of a gift that it is a part of the giver’s “nature and substance” (Mauss 1990:12). By accepting a gift, a social tie is created between giver and recipient, and this relationship can be described by the general theory of obligations of giving, receiving and reciprocating. Failing to fulfill any of these obligations “is to reject the bond of alliance and commonality” (Mauss 1990: 13). Weiner (1992: ix) describes this phenomena as “keeping-while-giving,” which she regards as the central issue of social life. In this sense certain gifts are inalienable, because they create a relationship between people that is produced and interpreted within a particular cultural context. This particular context determines the idiosyncrasies of the obligations attached to a gift exchange, influencing the participants’ relative positions within the social structure (Weiner 1992: 150).

One of the most valuable pieces of advice I have received in regards to fieldwork was to always make sure to understand the nature and rules of exchange in the given context before engaging in it, and which I foolishly ignored during the first half of my research. Experience, and the necessity to understand the underlying structures of the community, eventually reminded me of the importance of this warning, and helped to explore the social complexities that are involved in an exchange. Hart (2007: 12) describe debt and credit as two sides of the same coin “the one evoking passivity in the face of power, the other individual empowerment”. Although their focus is not on social relationships within a network, I find Hart’s approach very useful in understanding power relations in terms of favors, rights, and responsibilities. The importance of these concepts does not lie in identifying who is empowered and who is not; rather in being mutually reliant on one another within the various networks and creating a real sense of security in the face of the unknown. People are linked together by participation in these networks, which also defines a temporary interpretation of their level of relatedness.

3.4.2. Levels of Relatedness

In small rural communities such as Nanwalek, virtually everybody is related to one another by real or fictional ties; however, not all relatives are considered “friends” as well. Here, under friendship, I primarily refer to a relationship that is formed between two individuals on the basis of their enjoying one another’s company, and a preference to spend time together as a social activity regardless of kinship ties. From an individual point of view, everybody else living in the community is classified based on the kinship system, regardless of actual or fictional relations, and kinship terms like *anaanaa* (aunt), *angaa* (uncle), *emaa* (grandma or elder women), *appa* (grandpa or older man) can be permanently or temporarily extended to a variety of people (spelling based on Leer 2003).

While social interaction is influenced by loosely defined age groups, friendships are not limited by that. A person usually has one or two close friends from his or her own age group, while the rest of the friendships are formed through social networks with regards to individual preference. Most everybody has older or younger friends, although the nature of these various relationships might be different. In general, age in social

networking is regarded as a quality that forms the nature of the connections, and not as a restraint that prevents the creation of such ties. In real life interactions this concept translates into a system of regulation that automatically stakes out the type of the relationship that can transpire between two individuals. At the same time, how far, and how intimately this relationship will be developed, is up to the participants.

For example, given my age, my gender, and my family status (married with no children), older women, who had children older than me, usually treat me similarly as they would treat their adult daughters or nieces. This, of course, does not mean that they regard me as their daughter or niece; rather it means that my responsibilities towards them in a social context would be similar to what they expect from their daughters and nieces. I might need to go and fetch them a cup of tea or dessert in the community hall during potluck, if they need a ride somewhere I might take them on the honda, or if they express need for help I have to go and help them out regardless of my own convenience. In return, they might come and check on me once in a while, give me home-made foods, or things that they think I might be in need of. During our stay similar rules were applied to my husband as well, who, on several occasions, ended up “being volunteered” for certain tasks by Elders, on occasions when they considered him to be the best option for the job.

During potlucks or community events, I have often found myself sitting with older women, which, in retrospect, was due to the fact that I was interested in their conversation, and I was able to sit with them without any interruptions as I had no children to watch over. Other women in my age usually had one or two little ones, who kept them in constant alert, and made it difficult for them to join the group. For this reason, people frequently seek out each other’s company based on their momentary status, rather than on age, and tend to associate with those who have an understanding for their situations. Having children of the same age does not necessarily mean that the parents belong to the same age group; on the contrary, with most families having three or more children, it is quite normal for generations to overlap. Due to the large number of children, and the preference for large families, it is quite usual to hear a child say: “I’m gonna go see my baby uncle or aunt!”

In Russian Orthodoxy, children are considered to be a blessing, and that is the general attitude that people follow in Nanwalek. In general, children connect the various

families of the village together, and children are actively taught to recognize and classify their relations of their peers and of their adult relatives as well. It is a particularly important factor in the life of a village such as Nanwalek, where the number of children equals the number of adult residents. The rapid growth in population is mostly due to the fact that young adults often decide to remain in the village, or come back to settle down after a short period of absence spent in Anchorage or Homer. Dissimilarly to other Native villages in Alaska, in Nanwalek, it is mostly young men who leave the community for work, or training, while young women stay behind after their graduation to start a family. In general, couples tend to start having children in their early twenties, so it is quite normal to meet grandparents who are in their late thirties or early forties, and oftentimes, people live to see several of their great-grand children growing up.

One of the reasons people cite when moving back to the village is that “it is better for the kids” to grow up in Nanwalek, than in any city. Here, they can be outside during the summer, get to know their relatives, learn how to live in the village, and learn about their culture. At the same time, living in the village, and close to relatives, makes parenting easier for the adults as well. There is always help available for parenting advice, there are many relatives “watching” the kids inside of the house or outside, and there are community-wide initiatives for the different age groups. Emilie, one of the previous first chiefs of the village and a talented artist, runs a regular “crafts night” series for children, where they learn about the various techniques and materials used in Sugpiaq tradition, as well as to understand and combine this knowledge and ideas with new media and contemporary interpretations.

Children are free to go and visit most everybody in the village, and are usually welcome to every relative’s house. If families happen to have ‘little visitors’ when they settle down for dinner, then all kids present will be fed, or offered a treat. Most children do have to report to their parents on their whereabouts, and parents usually know where to look for their little ones when bedtime approaches (or in the case of the older ones curfew). Other times however, especially in case of children under school age, this flexibility of arrangements extends even further. Newborns and children up to three years of age usually spend most of their time in their mothers’ company, meaning wherever the mom goes, she takes the baby(ies) along with her. Therefore it is not unusual for little ones to eat in different houses, or to be put down for a nap wherever the mom is at the

time. I have seen kids peacefully napping in the church during service, in the community hall in the middle of masking, and in various people's houses during potlucks and family dinners. In cases when both parents have to leave the village for a couple of days, as for example taking one child to the doctor in Homer, the children remaining behind are usually either watched by a relative in their own home, or placed under the care of different relatives in different homes. Either way, children learn early on that there are many people who can and will care for them, provide them with food, sort out their "fights" and give them their bottles before they go to sleep. I do not claim that such child rearing practices are idiosyncratic to Nanwalek; after all, Gallatin Anderson gives a very similar description of life in a Danish village (1990: 37) and Briggs (1974: 264) of Inuit camp-life, yet I do believe it can be regarded as characteristic of small compact communities. Through the shared responsibility of childcare the notion of flexibility is taught to children early on, and they are actively conditioned to deal with the ever changing circumstances. There is usually a house that they call "home," yet they learn not to place too much emphasis on this notion, as it might change quite often through their lives. Families move from houses to apartments, in with grandparents, and away from extended families, as also families might break up due to a divorce, and re-form through re-marriage, etc. As a result, the only "constant home" in the lives of the children is Nanwalek itself, and their own realization that they somehow belong to this particular village. Through these experiences children learn to create a self image that ties them to the village, and they view themselves as a part of a larger system of relations.

Russian Orthodoxy has not only religious but also social significance in the life of Nanwalek; consequently, children learn to view themselves as Orthodox Christians while growing up. Children are taught to distinguish their godparents from all their other relations early on and to view them as a "second set of parents". Adults take babies and young children to Church on a regular basis, teach them to take communion, venerate icons, ask and receive blessings, and participate in the liturgy according to their abilities. By growing up practicing their faith children develop a distinct idea of being part of a particular religious community, which also contains all their social relationships. For this reason their idea of social is not separated from that of religious, but integrated according to the conceptual analogy created based on the local mode of thought.

McCarthy Brown describes her position “as a member of the fictive kinship network” (2001: 38) during her long-term research involvement with a Haitian vodou priestess, Alourdes, who had treated her “like family”. She was one of the many relations who came and went in the family’s life, drew on the emotional and material resources of the extensive social network when in need, and contributed in a personally specific way when other members of the network required it. Similarly, Wenkart Smollett describes the “tremendous amount of visiting” and mutual assistance among kin relations within a social network in Bulgaria (1989: 129). It is not only the circulation of material goods such as jars of preserves, that move between the members, but also personal service, practical assistance with every-day tasks and providing a home away from home for those within the network. Evidently, the symbolic meaning of these favors is all the same regardless of their nature; they indicate a connectedness to one another and to the network itself, which is the underlying notion regarding the idea of relatedness in Nanwalek as well.

Naturally, Nanwalek is not some kind of utopia of a “big loving family” with no arguments or clashing interests. On the contrary, such problems are brought up and dealt with on a daily basis. Not everyone in the village gets along with everyone else, and similarly to any extended family, everyone has one particular person, an aunt, an uncle, a cousin, or a sibling, that they simply cannot see eye to eye with. The existence of social networks allows people to organize and re-organize their immediate connections. People choose certain relatives over others for specific reasons, although some families get along with each other better than others traditionally and historically, which is often carried on to future generations. At the same time, everyone is free to establish his or her circle of friends as a grown up, yet the majority of close relationships are formed through the parents’ social connections. This practice can be regarded as an extension of past practice in creating social ties, such as baidarka pairs, meaning men pairing up for hunting sea-otters (Alaska Commercial Company Collection: Box 9, Folder 105), hunting partners, or women who regularly take banya together.

Therefore the local ideas regarding relatedness seem to express and re-enforce the notions of flexibility and the importance of interconnections, which are developed in conjunction with the local understanding of social roles and culturally acceptable behavior.

Bodenhorn (2000b) describes questions of relatedness in terms of individual autonomy in the case of the Iñupiat of Barrow. She argues that the non-negotiable rights of autonomous individuals to resources are earned through labor, which also shapes the Iñupiat understanding of kinship. For this reason autonomy, which makes it possible for Iñupiaq people to constantly re-create and re-negotiate their kinship connections, is acted out through labor provided by individuals, and these actions are what “render kinship ‘real’” (Bodenhorn 2000b: 128).

Naturally, this does not suggest that people do not describe or acknowledge kinship in terms of biological relatedness; rather it emphasizes the flexibility of the local ideas and the importance of culturally appropriate behavior. Questioning such behavior or directly inquiring about how the various relations are structured is highly impolite. During one of his talks, Father Michael Oleksa cautioned outsiders going into an Alaska Native village and asking people how they were related to each other. It is interfering, prying into information that is considered private, and in most cases it is averted by a non-committal reference to being a cousin of some sort. In general, classification of relatives is always in constant flux and changes according to the life cycle. Some relationships can be terminated based on momentary consideration, or placed above others when establishing personal connections (Nuttall 2000: 43). Someone previously called “aunt” throughout childhood might become a mother-in-law as a grown up, for example through marrying a cousin of a cousin, or might become a mother through a remarriage. Similarly cousins twice or three times removed may become husbands and wives, or brothers and sisters through affinal relations, and there is a system of priority in the designation used for acknowledging these changes, placing the more specific relationship above all others. This system works in regards to all fictional and non-fictional family ties, as for example an aunt who also became a godmother (*maamkaa*) for a child would always be referred to as the latter, so as to separate her from all the other aunts and older relatives called aunts (*anaanaa*), to signify the importance of the connection. Additionally, while the system is flexible enough to include people who are not actually related to anyone in the village, due the system’s close connection to the etiquette governing social interactions, it becomes imperative to incorporate those who are not affinal or consanguinal relations, in order to assure a problem-free functioning of the social networks.

Expressing need, providing something that is needed, reciprocating favors, and balancing these acts based on relative social status achieves the maintenance of a social network that provide the basis for Sugpiaq social ranking. It is a system that can work on mutual understanding and participation; therefore it cannot tolerate elements that are foreign. For this reason people extend local kinship categories to long time, non-related residents, which helps in the creation of familiarity and the placement of outsiders into the proverbial system. Nanwalek, as presumably most Native villages, has a well-developed, firmly established etiquette that is non-institutionalized, yet closely followed. It provides venues for expression, regulates the modes of interactions and creates a sense of stability in a capricious environment. It also maps out individual progression through a life cycle and helps transition from one status to another with minimal upheaval and disruption to society as a whole. To be able to participate in local social life, one has to be aware of the rules that normalize individual behavior in specific circumstances that are almost always public in nature. Being aware, *llatuumaluni*, is a Sugpiaq concept that is taught to children from a very early age – and to outsiders – through various social venues. Children and adults alike are allowed to make mistakes, but are expected to recognize and correct them, at the very least in future interactions. Awareness in a public setting is highly prized behavior that provides an ability to promptly react to a sudden challenge or event and to constantly act accordingly the system of Sugpiaq etiquette.

4. Sugpiaq Etiquette

“To grasp concepts that, for another people, are experience-near, and to do so well enough to place them in illuminating connection with experience-distant concepts theorists have fashioned to capture the general features of social life, is clearly a task at least as delicate, if a bit less magical, as putting oneself into someone else’s skin” (Geertz 1983: 58)

Changes in ideas that define culturally acceptable and desired behavior occur over time; however, the basic concept of the need for a system that regulates human interaction remains (Berreman 1972: 583, Spencer 1938: 263). Knowing and actively following the rules of local etiquette precludes, or at least minimizes, social faux pas, and helps active integration into the system. At the same time, it also helps in realizing one’s own position in society (Caughey 1980: 173-174), which is constructed on the basis of age, gender, kinship relatedness, and status. To be aware of one responsibility as part of a discrete group one needs to be aware of one’s own standing within that group first.

On many occasions fieldworkers have remarked on the difficulties of re-learning “basic” cultural concepts and behavior, most memorable being amongst them Evans-Pritchard claiming to have periods of ‘Nuerosis’ (1977: 13); and my experiences were not any different either. The fundamentals of an etiquette that is ingrained in us through repetition is indeed difficult to overcome or to change, and even just the attempt requires a constant, conscious self-monitoring and hyper-awareness of the reactions received from the people around us. In Nanwalek, a simple act such as entering someone’s house can be a qualification of one’s own social status, and the actions of the hosts a signifier of its acknowledgment. As most peoples’ doors are almost never locked, there is usually no need to wait for a response of “come in” during the day after knocking. That is to say, when knocking on the door is allowed; during the three days of Easter, visitors are not supposed to knock on the doors for example, but just walk in and help themselves to the food left out on the table. In the rest of the year, however, knocking is accepted and required, except when entering one’s own, or a close relative’s house. Once through the door, or sometimes even on the outside or in the arctic entry, people remove their shoes, and enter the house. Exceptions exists, but due to the unpaved roads and the

temperamental weather conditions, an immense amount of dirt can easily migrate into the homes, and most people try to keep it at bay right at the entrance.

Apparently, standing on the inside of the door can make all the difference. Babies and small children, adored and spoiled village-wide, are always cooed over and presented with small gifts of attention (Briggs 1974: 266), while older children are usually ignored for a period of time. Starting at around 5 years of age, children have already learned to stand still at the door, until somebody pays attention to them and asks them what they came for. This can be done in a direct, business-like manner, or teasingly, depending on the personal relationships between the parties involved. At around 16 or 17, just before “coming of age,” teenagers, especially if they have just delivered something, or helped out in some ways, might be invited in to have something to eat. Being “underage” usually prevents teenagers to sit at the table and participate in the adults’ conversation; therefore being instructed to do so is a privilege in a sense, and also training for the future. Sometimes, even adults stop just right on the inside of the door in certain peoples’ homes, especially men, when they come for not just a social call, but for a specific reason of delivering or picking up something. Otherwise, adults are expected to walk into the house without stopping and to greet all the adult residents and small children once within.

All homes have a designated social area, usually outfitted with a table or chairs, where people can sit down, drink coffee or tea and visit. On some occasions this area might also be complemented with another one providing more privacy, which can be used by certain visitors. If there is an all male company on a location, female visitors are supposed to go and seek out the hostess of the house, greet her with a kiss and visit them for a while separately from the male company. Lingering for couple minutes with the men to exchange greetings, especially if ones’ own partner is present is acceptable, but spending longer periods of times in all male company is looked upon as peculiar. This is true in a reversed situation as well, and men would not stay in all female company for more than a few minutes unless they have a specific reason to. This of course does not mean that there is no chance for a social call in mixed gender company, which usually occurs when smaller groups of people gather; rather it means that every-day interactions are often still influenced by a gender division, and the ongoing feeling of a gender based *communitas* (Turner 1969) is re-enforced and maintained on a daily basis (Briggs 1974: 277).

These gender roles are mirrored in church participation as well. In many Orthodox churches, especially in the more traditional ones, women and men occupy opposite sides of the building. The left side is the female sphere; this is where most women and young children stand during services. The first panel from the center (from the royal doors) on the left side of the icon wall (iconostas) depicts the Mother of God (*Theotokos*), as also the icon placed in front of the icon wall for veneration. The right side of the Church is occupied by men during the service, with the exception of the choir and the readers, who might be women. The first icon on the wall to the right of the royal doors is always that of Christ, often depicted as *Pantokrator* (ruler of all, almighty, all powerful). Additionally, the sanctuary of the church (the area behind the icon wall including, among others, the altar) is an exclusively male domain. In Nanwalek no women or girls are allowed to enter the sanctuary⁸⁹, as it is restricted to Orthodox men and boys (who can enter through the two side doors). During an interview with one of the Elders, Kathy, remarked that this custom is strictly followed and while baby boys are taken into the sanctuary after their baptism and chrismation, baby girls are only held up at the door and allowed to “peak in” to the sanctuary (Interview with Kathy Brewster 2005).

During church services men take precedence over women in, for example, receiving blessings and venerating icons, but the gender division is not the only expression of status during services. In receiving blessings, or any time when people line up in Church in a religious context, the first ones in the line are Elders, specifically older men. They are followed by men with high status (especially that of status with religious association), then all adult men, and finally young boys. Any of these people may carry male babies, toddlers or younger boys along with them to receive blessings. The first ones in the line after the men are female Elders, followed by adult women and children. This conceptual order can, and quite often is, broken by the realities of life: a little boy forgetting to line up with the men, a teenage boy completing a task and arriving to join

⁸⁹ Women’s religious participation in church activities are also determined by their feminine bodily functions. In the past, women avoided church services during their periods; today however, they usually attend services, but refrain from taking communion. Women are also exempt from church in the first 40 days after giving birth, and there is a special ceremony that is performed in church when a new mother re-enters the religious community. Consequently, babies are often baptized in the absence of their mothers, which is possible because a child’s parentage in church is represented by their godparents, not by the actual parents.

the line after all the women, an adult man entering the church halfway through a service and queuing up with the women etc.

Articulated gender roles, either in a religious or a social context, are not expressions of a female-male struggle. Rather, they are complimentary to one another, as they are formulated to work together towards something more important, such as the completion of a complex task (Bodenhorn 1990: 67). For this reason, their interpretations are quite flexible, despite their seemingly strict division and demarcation of female and male spheres. Briggs (1974: 270) also describes the gender based division of labor in terms of flexibility: "There is nothing holy to them [Eskimos] about the sexual division of labor; neither is there, in their view, anything inherent in the nature of either sex that makes it incapable of doing some of the jobs that the other sex ordinarily does." Knowing when to be flexible and when to adhere rigidly to gender roles cannot be interpreted without contextualization. The constant re-interpretation of rules governing ideas of gender roles corresponds in its flexibility to that of general rules defining "appropriate" or at least "acceptable" behavior. Recognizing possibilities and knowing the difference between opportunities when transgression of rules will or will not generate negative social consequences can be achieved only by understanding the local mode of thought, which organizes Sugpiaq etiquette.

Entering into a house and barging right to the table always made me feel awkward and out of line. In the "outside world," one does not enter a home without invitation, and definitely does not head straight for the table or for the coffeepot. Doing so always made me feel uncomfortable and impolite, as if I was trespassing on people's hospitality, and I constantly tried to avoid the situation, until one day I realized that this "inappropriate" kind of behavior had direct effects on my status as an adult. I was giving a ride to someone to her parents' house where we were supposed to pick up a few things and deliver them to another place in the village. Once we entered the door, my companion kept walking on uninterruptedly, while I came to an automatic halt right on the inside of the door. Some adult residents of the house were sitting at the table, giving me a strange, confused look, as if they did not really know how to react to my behavior. From their point of view, I was behaving like a child, putting myself through a series of unnecessary actions that I had every right to avoid; therefore they had no choice but to treat me as if I really was a child, even though it made them feel uncomfortable. In my

mind I was still holding onto a notion of politeness as it had been impressed upon me since childhood, in a social milieu five thousand miles away from Nanwalek. In a second of realizing the situation, I took a deep breath and barged right into the kitchen, where to my greatest relief, everyone else seemed to relax and fall back into conversation.

Behaving in a culturally, in this case “Sugpiaqly,” proper way entails a combination of several factors which are based on the perception of social and personal identity (Caughey 1980: 174, Goodenough 1963: 186). At the same time, social control of behavior, essentially, what is conceptualized as being “good,” does not completely limit individual choice, and allows multiple types of reactions in a specific situation (Parker 1988: 382). Naturally, all choices have their consequences, on a personal, and through that, on a social level, which creates an ongoing cycle between behavior and social standing (Berreman 1972: 571). Following etiquette in a social landscape, where ranking and personal standing carries immense importance, allows people to participate and gain a membership in a social network and in the community. Consequently, this membership provides them with a “safety net,” an ability to cope with the unexpected turn of events, by drawing on the support and resources of their networks. For this reason, active participation in the system is an unquestionable obligation. One of the major aspects of fulfilling the obligations to one’s social network is achieved by socializing and paying regular social visits as to indicate personal dedication and to maintain good relationships within the network – in addition to being an enjoyable social activity.

4.1. “Don’t Be a Stranger Now”

“Is the coffee on?” or “the coffee is on!” is commonly heard in Nanwalek in regard to socializing and expressing ones’ intention to visit. It does not necessarily mean that the visitor has to have a cup of coffee, although most certainly it is available should one fancy a cup, but it does mean that one needs to sit down and engage in conversation for a few minutes in order to avoid being rude or being perceived as “stand-offish”. Visiting, and the rules that govern the protocol of the activity, vibrantly expresses the ideas involved in the construction of the social hierarchy of the village. For locals this multi-tiered social system translates to a series of obligations and privileges, which they need to balance according to their various social engagements.

One of the most important activities of my fieldwork was my daily “visiting round,” which, interestingly, was different from my husband’s. Almost every day, depending on the length of my household chores, I would start up and visit various households or locations in the village. Some people I would visit more often than others, and sometimes I would stop by somewhere just to say hello, while on other occasions I would visit for a specific reason. There were a few people and families whom I saw on a daily basis, and if for some reason I did not visit them for three days in a row, they would greet me with a highly evocative “Hi Stranger!” It was not necessarily a condemning expression, rather, a subtle reminder of one’s obligations towards maintaining a social connection, with perhaps a touch of reproach for shortcoming in the fulfillment. At the same time the expression could also be used for purely conversational purposes, when one met a long-time-no-see friend or relative, and was rejoicing in the reunion. Even today, we can be “in trouble” with one particular friend, if for some reason we fail to email or IM for over a week; with others, however, months can go by without any exchange of communication, yet when we go back to the village, we pick up where we left off with no further need for explanation.

Social visits, in general, are carried out in a variety of contexts; yet visiting is always done with keen awareness of the various social networks, and one’s own position within them. Within networks, higher status individuals are visited by lower status ones on a regular, sometimes daily, basis. It is the obligation and interest of those in a lower social rank to keep in touch with those wielding power. For example, Elders are visited by younger people, as also parents and godparents by their children and godchildren. These visits often do not have a purpose beyond cultivating the social relationships, and are often an addition to those conducted with a task in mind. In between networks, that is social visits between people who belong to different social networks, are often task oriented. Without having a specific reason for their coming together, it is highly unlikely that they would visit one another in a premeditated situation. People often cross network boundaries in public situations, as it is impolite not to engage in conversation, yet on a long-term basis, their efforts and engagements are concentrated on their active participation within their own social networks.

In a sense, the most important aspect of these social networks is the stability they provide for individuals and groups alike. Not belonging to any of the groups, and not

having regular connections with other families, result in a form of isolation that makes living in the village completely impossible. Consequently, there is a certain level of shared “paranoia of being left out” that is always quietly simmering under the surface, and which operates only in regards to one’s close social groups. At the same time, people can completely disregard remarks and exclusion by other social groups. Maintaining good relations inside of these social networks is essential, as even just one strained social exchange can disturb the entire network, thus people are usually quite pro-active in resolving problems and making amends.

For this reason, there are general unwritten rules that are observed in every day interactions. Younger people are supposed to go and see older ones and elders (Briggs 1974: 281), instead of waiting for them to come; on rare occasions when they do come to a younger persons’ house it is considered an honor and an acknowledgment of their good relationship. Similarly, as the composition of the village is in a constant flux due to traveling and attending to various engagements, so it is the duty of those who return from a trip to announce their presence by a short visit to their friends’ homes, almost as to re-instate or re-activate the relationship. Such gestures are not only expressions of common courtesy, but also important factors in maintaining association to social networks.

A related concept in Nanwalek, yet somewhat different in execution, is the practice of taking a banya (*makeq* or steam bath), where gender based social networks are cultivated, extended and re-organized.

4.2. “Come Have *Makeq*”

I was lying on the floor of the banya stretching my legs towards the heat radiating from the glowing woodstove. It once was an oil drum, but now had a door cut out on the front for the wood, and a chimney inserted on the top. It was covered with rocks from the beach that captured the heat and produced a thick steam whenever splashed with water. The stove took up both back corners of the steam room, while the front was covered with a raised platform accommodating two benches on the sides under the low roofline, and a space big enough for two persons in between. I was lying on the middle of the floor next to the two plastic tubs filled with water, readied by Matushka for us to use for washing at the end of the night. My skin was covered with moisture from the

pot simmering on top of the stove, from Matushka's splashing of water onto the hot rocks, and from my own sweat. I shifted my body slightly so that my right cheek could lay on my washcloth and my mouth would be positioned right next to the crack under the door, where fresh air was seeping in. I slowly felt my body relax, and the aches and pains melt away in the heat. I looked over to Matushka sitting on the bench, twirling her washcloth around in order to fan more heat to her lower back. I closed my eyes, listening to Matushka's story of her latest trip to Anchorage, letting the smell of her branches of mountain ash used for spanking, and the heat take over my body. I was indulging in the knowledge that on the other side of the insulated banya walls a full blown snowstorm was in progress, yet neither the howling of the wind, nor the coldness of the thick snowfall was able to affect us in our mini universe.

For me, the last splashing made it unbearably hot. The steam rising from the stove started to circulate in the small chamber, and Matushka picked up her branches to spank her back and shoulders. Needless to say, she was standing up in the middle of the room where the receding roof line gathered the most of the heat, and happily continued to enjoy the steam. For her, the *makeq* was just starting to warm up; for me, it was time to go out to the cooling room, and after wrapping a towel around myself, further out onto the porch for a cold break.

Public and private spheres of a society are usually arranged in terms of a dichotomy, yet the logic that states "culture is public because meaning is" (Geertz 2000: 12) seems to deconstruct this approach. Ideas about privacy are part of a shared cultural meaning; therefore they are inherently included in what is considered to be public. In this sense private and public spheres need not be polarized, but rather placed on a continuum that highlights the most important aspect of privacy: it is culturally constructed and consequently idiosyncratic, temporary, and fluid. Susan Gal looks at the public/private dichotomy "as a discursive phenomenon that, once established, can be used to characterize, categorize, organize, and contrast virtually any kind of social fact" (Gal 2002: 80). In this regard it is possible to look at certain aspects of life in Nanwalek as private, yet these ideas are usually abstract, and not based on physical privacy.

Taking a banya, naked or not, is unquestionably a public setting. Friends, relatives, and sometimes even strangers come together to enjoy the beneficial effects of the steam and the companionship and solidarity of the fellow bathers. Traditionally, a

group of men or women would take banya separately, and coed occasions are still very rare, as most people prefer “to go in” naked. Once it was remarked to me jokingly that it was acceptable for couples to go in together, “especially if they were newlyweds”. For this reason, I took my banyas in female company, and this is what my experiences pertain to.

A form of sweat bath was traditionally used by Sugpiaq people even before the Russians arrived, and after contact, steam baths became popular in many Native communities including Nanwalek. Naturally, variety in the shape of the banya⁹⁰ building and in traditions has developed in the various villages of the state. In Nanwalek, some people prefer to have a larger banya, similar to a smaller cabin, where the inside is tall enough for a person to stand erect, and the steam chamber has several steps built into the walls, similar to a sauna. In these steam-houses the cooling area is usually roomy enough for 5-6 people and it might even have a table and a cot in addition to the necessary benches and chairs. Others have smaller buildings with a low roof and just enough room for 2-3 people and a bench. Not everyone in the village has banyas built, so those who do own one, have a level of social obligation to invite others over when they decide to fire it up.

I was usually invited by Matushka to her steam-bath, who enjoyed both the social and the cleansing aspect of the activity immensely. Around 10 o'clock at night I would see her hauling out water from her house to her *makeq* across the road, and a few minutes later the chimney would start to puff smoke. It took about an hour or so, depending on the weather conditions, for the stove to heat up properly, so around 11 o'clock I would turn my two-way radio on and start waiting for her to give me a call when it was ready “for going in”.

On some nights it was only the two of us, and on other nights she had three or four guests. I usually had no idea with whom I was going to take banya that night as Matushka liked extending invitations to everyone new in the village in addition to her “regular” guests. I especially enjoyed taking banya with Kathy and Melania, two Elders of the village, as they were both endless sources of knowledge on a variety of topics starting from traditional knowledge to life experiences. Some nights they would tell me

⁹⁰ *Makeq*, meaning “bathing,” same as banya, is alternately used in the community.

about the different plants and their uses in traditional Sugpiaq culture, other nights about child rearing, or how to deal with the challenges of married life. Being naked also provided occasions to discuss topics that otherwise would not have been likely to come up in other conversations, such as the involvement of a woman's body in pregnancy and childbirth or other physical and psychological ailments. Of course, these occasions were not exactly somber in nature; rather, a mixture of funny stories, spooky stories, joking and some serious talk.

It seemed that not wearing clothes in banya created a special connection of shared intimacy, where women were more open about their feelings and thoughts. Those who share banya time with one another usually end up having a better understanding of each other in other social situations as well. Naturally, for people who do not get along, sharing a *makeq* on a regular basis can be quite uncomfortable, as for some reason being naked or partially naked also makes it almost impossible to "fake" emotions or interest. Therefore banya time becomes an additional, and very enjoyable, level of social networking opportunity, which connects the inhabitants of the community together.

Since privacy is a culturally constructed concept, and people are conditioned to find certain situations acceptable and comfortable over others, the division between public and private spheres has its own particular meaning in Nanwalek. Essentially, every setting, to a certain level, is public, and it is virtually impossible to find aspects of life that are considered purely private. In addition to the customary public buildings such as church, community hall, store, post office, school, and the road that connects them, other spaces that are usually regarded as "private" in other traditions are also considered public. Homes are rarely locked during the day, and many leave their door open during the night as well. I became accustomed to the "open-door policy" of the village and locked my doors only at night or when asleep. Well into the fieldwork however, my doorframe broke, and my door stayed shut only if I actually locked the door. As it was fairly warm, I did not even bother doing that most of the times, which resulted in finding several dogs peacefully sleeping in my living room after returning from the store. Since the dogs very resourcefully figured out that leaning against the front door will provide them a comfortable place to nap, they developed the habit of opening the door several times a day, so I started locking it when the weather turned colder. One day I heard knocking on my door and after yelling "come in" I realized that it was locked, so I went and opened it.

My visitors, two ladies, were somewhat taken back, and briskly asked me if we were “honeymooning”.

On another occasion, I visited someone and went to use the toilet in the house. While I was in the bathroom I could clearly hear everything that was said in the living room, and I was soon asked a question since I was still clearly a part of the conversation regardless of what I was doing at the moment. This took me by surprise, and it was only after a couple of similar situations that I started to be accustomed to the local re-interpretation of a sphere that I previously regarded as very private. These two events highlighted the importance of how the “non-existence of privacy,” shapes local behavior and influences the ways in which people interact with one another. When most aspects of life are out in the open, there is clearly a need for a strict regulation that is known for all participants and creates a shared understanding of circumstances and comfort, which is very public. Boundaries constructed on the ideas of physical or personal space do not really exist, yet there is a shared understanding and respect regarding individual thought and opinion. The constant togetherness experienced by people living in the community entails closeness not only on a physical, but also on social and emotional levels. It helps people to become aware of others around them, assess their emotional, material, and social needs, and engage in cooperative networks for their fulfillment.

4.3. Know How to Ask

When we first arrived to Nanwalek, we did not really have contact with a lot of people living in the village. We knew we had to start working on the house, so we had sent down some tools and supplies, which we thought would take us through the first couple of months of our stay. It soon became clear that we needed much more help than we originally accounted for, as we had really no idea how to actually *do* the renovation. During our stay we learned how to frame and build walls, construct and hook up plumbing, put up insulation and siding, put down flooring, and run wiring for electricity. All these tasks would not have been possible without help from various people in the village, but at first we did not really know anybody, and we definitely did not know there was a specific way we needed to ask for help.

One day, while we were working on putting up siding on the outside of the house, Nancy, one of the ladies working in the community hall stopped by on her way home, and told us that the results of our work were looking great, in fact, the following day she was going to come and help us for a while. She also added that it was to be an exchange of labor, and in return she needed help taking things out from the old church building before they burned it down. She said she might or might not ask for help from us, but we were to help her when she does ask, to which we happily agreed. The next day she indeed came by, armed with a hammer, and spent the day helping us complete one of the walls.

At first, I was taken aback by her frankness, although it was kindly put and meant. Later on, I became thankful for it, as her explanation not only spelled it out for me how doing favors worked in Nanwalek, but also allowed me a way to be incorporated into the local social exchange market. From then on I started to understand that “being in debt” to someone was a normal state of affairs in the community. While the idea of debt could be varied from goods and favors to actual monetary debt, it was given on an understanding that the person “borrowing” was somehow connected to his or her benefactor until everything was returned, repaid, or reciprocated (Douglas 1990: ix). Theoretically, there were no such things as “unreturned” favors, but there were life-long loans and relationships, where both parties knew quite well that reciprocation would not be forthcoming any time soon.

When people refuse a favor that they could very well afford, it is not only regarded as being “stingy,” but also as being unsociable (Hugh-Jones 1992: 61). By removing the particular item from the “realm of reciprocity” when it is shared, it becomes “charity” (McCarthy Brown 2001: 179). Burch points out, based on his research in North-west Alaska, that generalized reciprocity was only used in the specific case of local family, and while Elders often pointed out that “everyone in the village used to share,” in the past, everyone in the village was part of a larger family (Burch 1988: 108-109). In Nanwalek, generalized reciprocity (Sahlins 1965: 147) can be found in many different kinds of relationships, and it can be viewed as the “central importance in the operation” (Woodburn 1998: 48) of the village. Woodburn states regarding Hadza meat-sharing that “their transactions are defined more by political pressure than by personal choice” (Woodburn 1998:62), although I would like to point out that regardless of the existence

of such pressure, sharing is personal choice; it can communicate messages of inclusion into or exclusion from a particular network. While sharing may not include the immediate or conscious calculation of returns (Price 1975:4), in effect it does assume it. Bodenhorn (2000b: 133-134) distinguishes between “sharing” and “shares” in Iñupiaq communities. She regards sharing as an individual choice, an enactment of generosity, which connects the actors of a social arena to one another. Shares, however, are earned by active contribution to a task, and in this sense are not depended on another person’s generosity. In this sense “sharing” can be regarded as an “inalienable gift” (Weiner 1992), because if there was no notion of return, even if it is delayed or never happens, it would not create a connection among the people within a social group or network, which in turn could not be relied on in times of need.

During my recent follow up work in Nanwalek, Daryl, a newly returned member of the community, pointed out to me that oftentimes when people ask to have small things without the intention of returning it, they still would use the phrase: “Can I borrow?” So there are cigarettes “borrowed,” kleenexes “borrowed,” diapers, onions, spices, detergent, and many other smaller items “borrowed,” without the actual intention of ever paying it back in the manner in which it was borrowed. These acts of “borrowing favors” strengthen the social engagement of the parties involved, and will eventually result in the return of favor that is involved in the act of borrowing, even if the goods themselves never make it back to the originators. In this sense the idea of borrowing is much more meaningful than simply finding needed resources, and at the same time, it is such an integral part of life in Nanwalek, that a few days after the conversation I found my husband asking Daryl to “borrow” some Clorox wipes to clean off a table. Obviously, we were not going to return three sheets of wipes to him at any point, but we were prepared to lend him other resources or help him out with small favors. By living in the same household we were already parts of the same social network system, in which goods, favors, and services were constantly shared on the basis of the general theory of obligations (Mauss 1990). It provided the social framework for the act of borrowing and, later on, for reciprocating which was channeled through the local conceptualizations regarding solidarity within networks.

Thereby I slowly started to realize that some favors were returned almost instantaneously, while others years later, if ever. I also started to notice that certain things

were borrowed all the time and without much ceremony, while other requests required a “leading up to” part, and could not be directly asked for. Sometimes people would come and ask if we had some kind of building material to spare; for example, when both water lines of the village broke during the coldest month of winter, everyone was scrambling around to find the needed pipe connectors so the problem could be solved, and water returned to the homes. We had children sent over to our house to check for parts four or five times a day, and while it was normal for them to ask directly what they were sent for, even the adults working on the problem tended to be quite direct about what they came for. There was simply no time to be wasted on chitchatting in this situation.

There were also other kinds of items that could not be directly asked for; rather there is a specific indirect way for the expression of need. This latter category of things usually included subsistence foods, but could be extended for other needs as well. When I was visiting one of the houses, a relative from the neighboring village of Port Graham was also over there. We were all sitting at the table drinking coffee, mostly listening to the conversation between the visitor and the residents of the house. They talked about the news in both villages, relatives, recounted some stories from the past and how the fishing was that year. After a while the visitor said that he was out of fish by now (meaning towards the end of winter), and he could sure use some. The hosts let this remark pass, and the conversation kept going on about other topics. About ten minutes later the visitor returned to his previous train of thought by saying that some fish would be really nice, but again, nothing really happened, and everybody kept on visiting. Finally just before he was ready to take off, the relative repeated his request the third time, by saying that he had no more fish left for the year and that he was looking forward to the fresh ones to come in. At this point the host stood up and brought a large ziplock bag of dried fish out of the freezer and told the visitor to have it, as they have some more bags left for themselves. The visitor was visibly happy and thankful, which he expressed by taking a couple of pieces of fish out and eating them right on the spot.

Knowing how to ask in a way that expresses genuine need and at the same time is effective in the specific cultural setting is a large part of being polite and following the local etiquette; not to mention that doing otherwise will result in refusal and ruined relationships. Throughout my time in Nanwalek I learned that it was important to ask in a manner that gives people an option for evading direct refusal. Refusing requests in a

straightforward manner is quite impolite, and putting people into a position of having to give a direct refusal is even more so. This applies in cases where the parties involved consider each other to have similar status, or if the resources in question are subsistence foods. People in Nanwalek learn to develop a keen awareness for one another's' needs, and an ability to understand the meaning of indirect messages embedded in everyday conversations. This elusive expression of need also allows both participants to step away from the conversation without any ill feelings toward each other, as it is clear, that if the request was not fulfilled for the third time, then it was not in the power of the addressed to comply with the favor, or supply the goods. In these cases the issue will be dropped, "one is spared the risk of embarrassment" (Briggs 1974: 287), and the social relationship is undamaged.

While subsistence foods such as fish, seal, fish eggs, sea lion, bear, moose, clams, snails, octopus, *baidarkis* (chitons), seagull eggs, etc. are almost always willingly shared, there are other kinds of things that are considered individual property (Shannon 2003). These are mainly things that are store bought "luxury" items, and are not considered basic needs of making a living. Soda pop, candy, chips, beer or any kind of alcohol, cigarettes and gas are things that can be shared with close friends and people within one's own social circle, but in general, there is a clear ownership attached to them. Other things considered as a basic grocery item such as rice, flour, potatoes, soy sauce, spices, oil, Crisco, condiments, canned vegetables, peanut butter, dry staples, chicken eggs, etc., are often "borrowed" between households, or given away to families who are in need of them. Similarly, it is customary to send plates of foods over to certain people without any special reason, just because there are plenty of leftovers, or because one happened to prepare the recipient's favorite food.

During community-wide events such as potlucks held in the community hall or dinners and name day parties at private houses, the hosts usually encourages the guests to assemble and take a plate back with them for the rest of the family, and it would be quite rude doing otherwise. Therefore food, here meaning prepared dishes, and prepared or unprepared subsistence foods, has a special place in the local social exchange system, and can be obtained in both active and passive ways. Actively asking for something and passively receiving foods from someone both contrive social engagement, and in my view, can be regarded as procurement. According to Ingold (1996) procurement and

sharing cannot be separated from one another, and acquiring resources through reciprocity requires (social) skills, “attentive ‘coping’ in the world,” and intentionality (Ingold 1996: 149). Based on her research with Inuit of Coral Harbour, Shannon points out that procurement describes “what Inuit do in obtaining a resource,” which is not solely “an interaction in nature” (2003: 51). Consequently, the importance of “knowing how to ask” cannot be separated from the notions of “knowing how to receive,” and “knowing how to give,” because they are always carried out according to the participant’s standing in relation to others, and within a specific cultural context, regardless of the nature of what is being shared.

4.4. “I’m Gonna Let Those Kids Help”

During a grayish rainy day in June, my husband was very determined to take his newly fixed boat out for jigging, regardless of the fact that all the other boats were heading back to shore amid the continuously growing waves. The boat was his winter project, an old Klamath aluminum boat lent to him by his friend, Wally, with a hole on the side, which my husband gorilla glued, duck taped, and painted, until it was floating again, and ready to be put on the water. He ended up buying a motor for it, and had a couple of test runs in the lagoon, but was getting anxious to try it out on open water. Simple as it sounds, taking out a boat from the lagoon was not quite a harmless activity. The water levels could drop drastically, so one needed to follow a channel leading out to the bay, and needed to know the location of the boulders and rocks hiding under the surface in addition to the extensive kelp beds.

On that specific day, these challenges were made even more difficult by the waves and poor weather conditions and despite all the other boats’ speedy return to shore, my husband had decided to go out anyway. He was accompanied by one of the teachers, who did not qualify for an Alaska fishing license just yet, and had to purchase an expensive out-of-state one for a week; therefore, he was determined to put it to as much use as possible.

Later my husband recalled that on their way down to the lagoon, they ran into one of the local men skilled in fishing and boating around the area, who was in the process of bringing his own boat into the lagoon. As they stopped for a short

conversation, the local man kept making remarks on how bad the weather was for jigging, and that he was for sure not going to try going out again that day. As he saw no change of heart in my husband, he finally made a direct remark on how it probably was not a safe idea to take the boat out.

To avoid conflicts, people usually refrain from passing direct judgment and from volunteering suggestions. In this specific case, making a direct remark was a result of the reality of the dangers involved in a bad decision, and a genuine feeling of not wanting to see someone less experienced get hurt. It was unusual to hear such a direct remark regarding someone else's plans, as generally situations with open conflicts were to be avoided at all cost. Normally, they were handled impersonally, through a mediator, who was supposed to deliver the unfavorable message. It was important to approach problems from a non-conflict perspective, especially if dealing with a friend or close relative and there was no mediator available. Briggs calls this indirect approach to conflict "a system of social control that works largely by innuendo" (1991: 261), while Slobodin (1962, 1969) highlights the importance of delivering a warning message "camouflaged" when it is done to protect the less experienced from danger. Such danger is not always physical, and the same principle is used in social interactions when protecting (or trying to protect) someone from committing a blunder.

On another occasion, my husband had received a phone call while at a friend's house, from the wife of his friend, inviting him over for a dinner party that she had prepared in honor of her husband's birthday. It just so happened that there were several dinners going on in the village that day and my husband misunderstood whose dinner he received an invitation for, and he gave a non-committal answer. A few minutes later Elmer, my husband's friend, showed up at our place and the two of them settled down for some coffee, after which he mentioned that he was having a dinner later on. To which my husband exclaimed, "you're having a dinner too!" then realized his previous misunderstanding, and was thoroughly horrified by how his refusal could have been interpreted by his friend, who, on the other hand seemed a lot more interested in finding out what would have caused my husband's perplexing behavior. According to local etiquette, Elmer never actually asked for explanation regarding my husband's behavior, and he did not seem to be upset by it either; instead, he simply provided an opportunity to clear up the situation.

For someone like myself, who comes from a culture where facing conflicts is not a way of resolution, rather a favorite pastime activity; living in a culture that actually prefers avoiding direct conflicts was extremely puzzling. It is needless to mention that for a long time I did not understand any of the memos that were delivered to me by a third party alerting me to a cultural or social faux pas I had committed in the community or against someone. To be honest, even today, I still have difficulties perceiving these situations, although, after having completed the fieldwork, I do find some references in my notes which, I suspect, were the subject of a conflict, and I was the recipient of a “wasted” memo. I also have to admit that, as far as I know, people graciously overlooked my inability, and let go of the subject.

At the same time, it is also important to note that the notion of conflict avoidance is embedded in a ranked social system in Nanwalek; therefore, it is possible to give direct orders to those who are considered to have a lower standing than one’s own. Children, teenagers, and young adults are constantly “told what to do,” as well as adults in situations when the orders come from a person of authority and prestige. However, there is a specific way of giving orders or making requests, through an expression that still leaves some room for negotiation.

I was interviewing an Elder of the village, Irene, who usually prepares the bread for the Church used during the services. When I arrived at her house, she had several of her grandchildren around, and while we were pulling out the bowl and the flour, she told me that she was “gonna let this one” [one of her teenage granddaughters] help make the bread. Although the strict interpretation of the expression suggested that the girl had a choice in the matter, it was not so. She was already in the house, given an order, so she had to comply with it whether she liked it or not. Yet the expression suggested that she had the option of refusing the “request,” which, in other situations might happen. Sometimes children can pretend that they did not hear the order, and stay clear of the person for a while, but usually in the end they have to do what they are told, especially the older ones, regardless of their own desires.

The formula is widely used in the community, and it is very catchy; I usually fall back into the habit of using it after spending a few days in the village. It is very effective as well, since it works on different levels according to the nature of the relationships. For those who should be taking orders, “I’m gonna let you” means “I’m gonna make you”.

For those, especially adults, who have no reason or responsibility to take orders, it gives the option to follow suit, or else, step away from the situation. For example, when talking about upcoming events and fundraisers for the Church, women often get together to come up with ideas. If someone makes a suggestion along the lines of, “we should let the kids help clean up,” or “we should let so-and-so order things online and sell it,” and the other participants do not think it to be a viable idea or simply do not wish to follow through with it, they still might end up expressing their agreement. After all, they might genuinely think that it was a good suggestion, even though they know perfectly well that it will be “put on the back burner,” maybe forever; yet conflicts are to be avoided at all costs between people who have similar standing, as they cannot make each other do things they do not wish to do.

It is not that small communities have no conflicts, or that their “normal” state is harmonious and congenial. Rather it is that there are constant conflicts that need to be mediated and cannot be ignored on a long term basis (Gluckman 1968). Hence the explicitly developed system and formula, which work by innuendo, are used for solving such problems and evading them whenever possible (Briggs 2000: 111). Again, people have to live in a community where they constantly rely on a ceaselessly changing social network system and by keeping certain connections stable, they can handle the rest of the problems encountered outside of their immediate social network. For this reason, they need to comply with certain social obligations, and they need to behave in such a way that allows them to be included in and incorporated into the system. Concurrently, the complex cultural and social skills that people learn to develop and use in their every day lives also become significant markers of identity that differentiates a Sugpiaq, “real person,” from the rest of the world.

4.5. “They’re Not Like Us”: Images and signs of trueness.

I was riding my Honda down to take banya again at Matushka’s. After parking, I grabbed my bag filled with towels and a water bottle and headed for the steam house as I saw the lights were already turned on, the door left slightly open, and the curtain pulled over the entrance to shield the view from passerby. To my surprise I found two unknown girls in there already, who came to Nanwalek for a week as part of an

Orthodox missionary team. They seemed a little bit lost, sitting there naked only with a towel to cover themselves. They informed me that Matushka had to run inside but would be back shortly. As I was cold, I stripped down quickly, arranged my belongings on one of the benches and suggested that maybe we should go into the steaming chamber. They followed me along, with some nervous giggling and chatting, and as we settled down on the floor of the banya, they told me that this was their first time in a steam bath and that I had to tell them what they needed to do. So I explained about the heat, that it was dry before we started splashing water onto the rocks, and it would get even warmer after the steam started to circulate, how they should try laying on the floor in case they were getting too hot, what the basins full of water and the scrubbers were for, and that they should use the spankers on themselves from the feet up. They spent a couple minutes taking all this information in, and after some silent steaming, one of them asked me if I had spent my entire life in the village. That puzzled me a great deal. While I told them that I have been living in Nanwalek only for a year, I found it intriguing that I was mistaken for a local villager.

Not that it had never happened before; on the contrary, it happened on a regular basis whenever I was out in Homer doing my shopping. In the grocery stores I attributed this to the fact that instead of asking for my shopping to be put in plastic bags, I requested boxes that could be easily dropped off at the airport terminals and put on the small planes. But I soon had to realize that merchants asked me “if I lived across the bay” even when I bought only one or two small items. Could it have been the clothing? The mannerism? The language or the accent? I still have no idea even today what made them come to that conclusion. I asked my friends in Nanwalek if they have had similar experiences and they just all laughed, assuring me that it was quite normal, and “they [outsiders] always know”. I knew most people in Nanwalek spend at least two or three weeks per year in Anchorage or in Homer, and some traveled back and forth all the time. Therefore most everybody had experiences in a town or city, and the challenges of living and coping with such circumstances. So I started to consciously focus on the question how “being outside” was different from “being at home,” and how it changed local social connections, behavior, and in general the reliance on social networks.

During one of my interviews I discussed the differences of this dual living pattern with Pauline. She was a teacher born and raised in Nanwalek with a large

extended family, so when she was working at the school, most of her students were her own grandchildren, nieces, or godchildren. Yet, she also had a detailed knowledge about the differences of living on the “outside,” as she spent several years in Anchorage when she was completing her education and teacher’s certificate. She used a metaphor to describe her experiences:

In the city you become somehow soft. You don’t have anybody to criticize you, or tell you something. And in the village you became very strong, like a tree that’s been blown, and it becomes very strong. Take that from others, your relatives, especially your family, [be]cause everybody says anything about each other, and that’s how you become strong again. [Be]cause in the city nobody said anything like that to you, put you down, or straighten you out. All of a sudden you’re back home, you gotta become that strong person again, in that area. But maybe in the city you gotta be strong and surviving. You’re all alone. You gotta do this or do that in order to get where you want to be, or where you don’t starve. Like I had to go to school seven o’clock in the morning. It’s dark. And I had to go to the dark area where’s there no houses, and I had to go through there, and wait by the light for the bus, and I’d see some drunks walking by. Scary! Those are the things you have to become strong to survive. But when you’re in the village, you can walk at night, you’re not scared or anything. But you’re [told how to do things]. In the city it’s the opposite. Nobody tells you what to do, [but nobody cares about you either]. You can starve to death.... I am thinking about it. [Be]cause when I lived in Anchorage I was in fear all the time. Fear of being shot at, of somebody’s gonna steal my stuff. [In the village] you’re spikes come down. The spikes of fear of being in the city. You know where you have to know exactly what you’re doing. Watch out for this, watch out for that. Like you’re always watching, like you’re guarding all the time. But then when you come home, you drop those. In Anchorage, nobody cares how you act. You can be anybody you want to be. And when you come home, you gotta be the person you are. Aware of your actions, but your spikes has come down, that you had in Anchorage, or the city, or other place. Because you know everybody here, you feel safe. Like coming home to your mother, to the womb you were in. You’re comforted, but you still gotta feel pain too. But you’re still with your relatives here. Any person that you want to run to or ask [for something] you know (Interview with Pauline Kvasnikoff Demas 2006).

Most people born and raised in small communities have similar experiences of urban life, and being away from their village is often more demanding than what they can cope with. They often decide that the conveniences and amenities of city life are not enough to outweigh the stress and alienation of being away from home, and they often end up moving back to where they have come from. This is probably one of the reasons for Nanwalek to have so many children and young adults actively living in the community on an every day basis, with no intention of moving away. They might “try their wings” on the outside for a while, yet they usually end up coming back and settling down in the village.

In the village one knows what to expect. There are relatives who might be nice and willing to help as also other ones who might not. Regardless, people know very well on whom they can count on, whom to ask for various things, how to ask them, and how to avoid arguments or unpleasant situations. They also know how they need to behave with different members of the community, as they are sisters, aunts, daughters, godmothers, mothers, cousins, wives and grandmothers in their various relationships that all have different expectations and rules. They know how to be themselves, as they were raised in this system and can participate in the social networking with great success. In the village they find a constant safety network that they can rely on every single day of their lives. Of course, the composition of the participating members of social circles changes all the time, but the system itself is continuous, and provides support to everyone within (Csoba DeHass 2007). My friend Sperry remarked one time that you can live in Nanwalek even if you do not have money, all you need is fish and rice; and on the whole he was right. Fish, as one of the main staples in the village, is easy to come by if one is willing to work, while rice is also a staple that one can easily obtain from relatives even when lacking the financial resources. The act of pooling together resources are often associated with small scale societies and group-oriented migration strategies (McCarthy Brown 2001: 9, Newman 2001: 771), because it provides security when interpreted within a particular conceptual framework which governs ideas of reciprocity (Graves and Graves 1974: 128-129).

For the same reasons, money and monetary exchange also differs greatly from outside understandings. It is not that one does not need any money in Nanwalek; it is

good to have, for sure, in any circumstances. Yet, it is not an ultimate medium of exchange, and it does not necessarily get everything one wants or needs. Outsiders often find it astonishing that money does not necessarily buy things in the village. They often expect to have a right to have things done with money, just as they assume to have purchased a right to come and stay in the village alongside their airplane tickets. Very soon they find out that getting things done in the village is very different from getting them done in the city. In the city it is mostly the question of a sum, and strangers provide goods and services for monetary compensation. In a village however, including Nanwalek, it is a delicate negotiation of connections and favor that also influences and is influenced by personal standing. Not being part of this system is just as bad as trying to “buy your way” out of it. Since it is almost impossible to make a living in Nanwalek in seclusion, most everybody is connected by favors and obligations. Not being part of this system is a sure sign of being an outsider, somebody who does not belong, and who will be treated accordingly in every day interactions, politely, but distantly. For example, teachers who work in villages often lead a separate life from the community. Naturally some participate in the system to various degrees, but for the most part, they are somewhat alienated with no social ties and obligations. Therefore outsiders who come to Nanwalek and are willing to participate are always welcome and appreciated. During my stay two of the teachers, a married, non-Orthodox couple, decided to participate in the Christmas festivities, and were just as excited in waiting for the Star to arrive to their house as everyone else in the village. After the singing and blessing finished, we all sat down to sample food laid out on the table, when Father remarked that this was the very first time he had been to one of the teacher’s houses, let alone being there in his priestly function. Later on, everyone who had heard of this news was quite surprised, but also pleased. From then on the couple was somehow more connected, more a part of the community, and the next year, when the husband decided to dress up and dance during masking (to the great enjoyment of the village), people were even more delighted.

Voluntary separation from the rest of the village is also often interpreted as being aloof and expressing superiority. In a social system where networks are so embedded in every day life and social ranking regulates every day interactions, not accepting and returning favors can be a great insult. Similarly, refusing food or tea during visits is interpreted as refusing hospitality and the hosts often regard it as being stand-

offish; as if their food was looked down on as undesirable, and they, as not good enough to share a meal with. Recently, a couple of college students from other parts of the U.S. came to spend some days in various Native communities so as to experience the “real Alaska”. The ones that were stationed in Nanwalek were taken out for fishing, collecting seafood, and in general allowed to be involved in a variety of local projects. They were also offered traditional foods, one of them being *akutaq*, Eskimo ice cream that is made of mashed potatoes, seal oil, some sugar, and fermented fish eggs. For those new to this delicacy the seal oil alone can make it difficult to enjoy, but as these students had the right attitude to life in a village, they tried it anyway. One of them, after taking a spoonful, declared that it was “interesting,” and everything seemed to be fine until he actually bit into one of the fermented eggs, on which he commented “wow, what a burst of flavor!” Although the strong flavor caught him by surprise, he still managed to say something positive about it, which is exactly the correct behavior in Nanwalek, not to mention the entertainment he provided as the story circulated in the community for the following days.

Naturally, people do not expect everyone to like all the different varieties of subsistence foods gathered in Nanwalek, but they do expect outsiders not to make derogatory remarks on what is being offered to them, and give everything a try at least once. People know that most of these meals need an acquired taste, and children in the community are raised to enjoy these foods from a very early age. Outsiders on the other hand are “fair game,” and as teasing and joking is also an important part of social relationships in Nanwalek, outsiders are often “tested” with such foods. When we first came to Nanwalek someone “let” my husband eat a fried fish head, and watched him quite closely to see if he actually finished it. On another occasion, I was at a potluck for an Elder’s namesday, and took a spoonful of *akutaq* so as to try it, to which one of the ladies remarked that it had seal oil. Due to the fermentation process by which seal fat is turned into oil, too much of that can make one sleepy and cause diarrhea, so her warning was kindly meant, yet her surprise of me actually wanting to try it was unmistakable. Joking about *Kasagaqs* (white people) trying to eat Native food are endless, yet it is worth trying the various dishes and foods offered, as there is such an abundant variety of subsistence foods available that it is impossible not to find various dishes that one can

truly like and enjoy. True, in the process one might end up being teased or made fun of, yet it is also a huge part of the incorporation into the network of social ties.

Normally, teasing is done on a regular basis to children, partly to gently lead them towards making right decisions, and partly to “toughen them up” for criticism that might be forthcoming in their adult lives (Briggs 1974: 268). In adulthood, having a teasing relationship with someone is considered a friendly social tie. Being able to take jokes without getting angry or hurt is a desirable attitude, which is outweighed only by the ability to return the teasing in a funny manner. The first time I chopped wood I had someone calling down to me from the porch of the community hall saying that “I chopped like a girl,” and I should let someone show me how to do it properly. Another time my husband I were fishing and the end of the runway, and were trying to see where the school of fish we had been following disappeared to. A couple of men pulled up behind us in a truck, and we started to chat. Finally one of them pointed out where the fish were, and told us laughingly, that in order to see them you needed to have those “slanted eyes” like Natives. By the end of our stay it was quite normal for people to say things such as doing something “the white people’s way” in front of us, or to us, not even considering that it would apply to us as well. They of course knew that we were “white”; yet by living in Nanwalek just like everybody else, it was also clear that we were not like “whites on the outside”. When people say “white” in a village it is considered in relevance to a lifestyle that people who are not from the village lead, and which is quite different from the ways things are done in Nanwalek. While it is considered suitable for them, it is not regarded as practical, good, or fitting for village life, therefore it stays alien and foreign.

In fact people are quite accepting in Nanwalek, and in general, very tolerant towards personal eccentricities (Csoba DeHass 2007). Since conflict avoidance is the decisive attribute of public social interaction, people have no problem to recognize and respect individual taste, preference, and peculiarity. Everybody knows who the “night owls” are and who are the “early birds” in the village and make their visits and social outings accordingly. Some people are well known for their preference for certain foods or drinks, while others are noted for having a specific hobby, talent or training. For this reason even when somebody’s actions and decisions make no sense in the local context, or they go against the local norm, such as buying the “wrong brand,” it is not seriously

criticized in a face-to-face situation; although, depending on the closeness of social ties, it could be used for joking and teasing for years to come. As an example, during our stay a couple of the teachers took up running and they were regularly seen jogging around the village on Friday afternoons and weekends. Although there are some locals in Nanwalek who utilize the airport for sports, especially for playing Aleut baseball, walking, and biking, such intensive workouts as regular jogging are not very common, as most people focus their physical energies on completing daily or seasonal chores like chopping wood, catching and cleaning fish, gathering wood, berries and other subsistence foods. Therefore such dedication to jogging was received with quite a bit of surprise and general mystification, yet since it was “their thing,” nobody really said anything, and soon the pair of running teachers became a part of “normal life” in Nanwalek.

On some occasions these eccentricities are not really that peculiar as the activity itself, rather the oddity comes from the person who does them or the circumstances. In my situation, for example, I became known as a person who can build things in general, although I had no previous experiences, just by the mere fact that I enjoyed working on the house, made visible progress, and did not shy away from tasks that normally would have been considered to be a “man’s job”. For this reason, people soon got used to the idea that I did things that are not necessarily done by women, and after seeing the results of my work, had no problem with it. One day my husband went over to the community hall to make a phone call, and at the reception area he was interestedly asked by several people what was I building, as they were hearing hammering and banging from outside. Although that particular day it was not me making the noise, it had happened so many times before that they automatically assumed otherwise, with no particular problems regarding my behavior. As I discussed earlier in this chapter, people’s ideas’ regarding culturally “appropriate” behavior are not one and the same with contextually “acceptable” ones (Bodenhorn 2000b: 133). In order to find a connection between the two, there is a need for a great deal of flexibility, which is the part of everyday reality for people of Nanwalek.

To me, at first, it was very strange to see people in a small community being so extremely flexible and accepting towards others, who pretty much had not the faintest idea of what they were doing and how they should behave. I was also surprised to realize that by a few months into the fieldwork almost all the children had learned our names,

knew that we were living in “the house on the cliff,” and, as a six year old informed me one day, we were doing research on the Church. Nanwalek also turned out to be the place where nobody complained about my accent once, in fact, for a change, my constant mixing up of third person gender pronouns was perfectly understood, due to the fact that Sugtestun, like Hungarian, has only one word for he/she/it and their corresponding spoken variations.

Very often Sugtestun and its usage in the village are referred to as endangered and dying out. While it is true that children do not learn Sugtestun as their first language anymore, it is important to acknowledge that it is used on an everyday basis by almost everyone in the village. Certain ideas are always expressed in Sugtestun (e.g. *appa* – Grandfather, *emaa* – Grandmother, *maamkaa* – Godmother, *taatkaa* – Godfather, *Puusiq* – God or a reference to praying/making the sign of the cross, certain foods such as *palik* – smoked fish, *tamuq* – dried fish etc) and never in English, while others are interchangeable (such as *kinaq* – who?, *cacaq* – what?, *asirtuq* – good, *tai ggut* – come here, *puyuuq* – to smoke a cigarette etc.). In general, some families use more Sugtestun in their everyday interactions than others, especially if they have an Elder as a close relative, who prefers to speak in Sugtestun. Not to mention that even those who are usually thought of as mostly English-speaking can remember their Sugtestun with a surprising rapidity and efficiency when wanting to convey a message not intended for the ears of outsiders. In general, it is still very much a part of every day life in Nanwalek, and plays an important role in shaping people’s perception of reality and communication.

Similarly, numerous other Sugtestun social norms are carried on and actively practiced on a daily basis as well. They all are an expression of being a Sugpiaq, “a real person,” and at the same time a marker of being one. All of these attributes are recognized within the group, consciously or subconsciously, as a unique marker of being a local from Nanwalek, and some of them are perceptible even for outsiders. One such marker is the act of traveling, which is almost always done in groups, and with reliance on various network groups inside and outside of the village.

Approximately halfway through my research I decided to leave the village for two weeks to attend a conference and to complete some shopping. According to the plan, I was to fly to Kodiak Island, the location of the meeting, and meet up with my husband in Anchorage a week later. He was supposed to fly out from Nanwalek and on to

Anchorage on the day of our meeting, but due to rapidly approaching poor weather conditions, everybody in Nanwalek who had appointments and business to attend to on the outside had to leave the village two days prior, on a moment's notice. Therefore many people from Nanwalek got stranded in Homer for a couple of days, my husband along with them. It is customary that people from the same village gravitate towards particular places when "in town," and they tend to favor certain hotels, shops, restaurants or bars over others. In Homer, people prefer to stay in the Windjammer, which provides kitchenettes in its rooms, has a friendly and understanding approach, and is often also used for long term stays, such as for couples from the village waiting for their babies to be born in the hospital.

On this particular occasion however, the number of people staying in Homer was so large, that they had to take up residence in other hotels and at friends' houses. Yet, this fact did not preclude them from meeting up for meals, and as my husband described, one morning about 25 "Nanwalekians" got together in a restaurant for breakfast, after which a group of them rented a van and drove up to Soldotna, some fifty miles up on the highway, to do some shopping, play rippies (pull-tabs), and to generally have a nice day. He described this experience to me as entirely communal, as it seemed to him that they all moved "in packs". They went to stores in packs, they went eating in packs, they stayed in hotels in packs, and they traveled in packs. My husband thought it was quite relaxing in a sense; as there was always someone familiar to rely on, borrow change from and to turn to, should some emergency arise.

It is very natural for people to rely on their relatives and friends from the village on the outside, even to the extent that they rather choose to travel with someone who is usually not in their social network in the village than with strangers. There might be two people who almost never socialize at home, yet once out of the village, they keep close together and prefer one another's company over anyone else. It is partly security that holds the people on the outside together, and partly social obligations or expectations that do not cease to operate even when removed from the larger social network of the village. Just because people leave the village it does not mean that they stop being Sugpiaq, or Orthodox for that matter, and in fact, in a sense, being outside of Nanwalek brings people closer to one another. Because they still share an intellectual framework, it makes it easier for them to negotiate the outside world together; there is no need for extensive

explanations regarding one's decisions due to the shared interpretations and understanding.

In chapters three and four I presented local interpretations and representations of what it means to live in Nanwalek today. I do not claim perfection, and I do not claim to have other people's experience. Yet, by living there, I have shared the realities of the community for a while, and however curtailed this experience is compared to that of being born and raised in Nanwalek, I gathered my own perceptions on being Sugpiaq in today's world. Being constantly aware and ready for the unexpected whether it comes from natural threats or cultural obligations, being active and responsive in social interactions, being aware of one's social standing in comparison to others, and being aware of other people's needs are all essentially a part of what I came to associate with life in Nanwalek. In a larger perspective, these characteristics are all parts of the system of social networks, providing material, emotional, political, social, and even religious support to their members, and which are based on a flexible and fluid interpretation of kinship relations and social hierarchy. As social networks are the foundation of social life in Nanwalek, it is inevitable to take a closer look at their actual operation, function and meaning, which I further discuss in the following chapter.

5. The Power Within

“the human mind [...] is driven to reflect on ethical and religious questions, driven not by material need but by an inner compulsion to understand the world as a meaningful cosmos and to take up a position toward it” (Weber 1963: 117).

In this chapter I address questions relating to power-relations within social networks, the concept of authority, and the connections between social and religious hierarchy as it is currently understood and enacted in Nanwalek. In short, I am exploring the power within; the factors that create social cohesion as well as the community's perseverance in their Orthodox faith as a part of their Sugpiaq identity.

Looking at society as an arena of conflicting interest groups (Morris 1987: 79) is not a novel idea in anthropology, nor, for that matter, the concept of using social networks to explore the ramifications of the connections of individuals in the creation, acquisition, and utilization of power and authority (Mitchell 1974: 280). The Foucaultian approach to power can be viewed through the notion of cultural models (Harkin 1996: 284), as persons actively participating in a given social network by “learn[ing] to conduct [themselves] properly, thus not only submitting to but reproducing structures of power” (Foucault 1983: 220, Harkin 1996: 284).

In the particular case of the Sugpiaq community of Nanwalek, where the idea of power and authority is closely connected to the operation of social networks, this cultural model is strongly influenced by the notion of charisma, which allows leaders to emerge and assume high ranking positions. These positions, and the conceptualization of status, are often not concrete; rather they can be placed on a continuum, defined by their relations to one another, and distinguished by nuanced differences. For this reason, I will refer to them as social ranks, and social ranking, not as social stratification, which according to Silverman (1966: 899) suggests a discrete articulation, a “pigeonholing” of prestige differences.

In this chapter I explore the correlations between social status and religious syncretism in Nanwalek today, the connections between the social aspects of the Sugpiaq and the Orthodox intellectual frameworks in regards to hierarchy, and the notion of

authority in the system of Sugpiaq Russian Orthodoxy through the analytical perspective provided by conceptual analogy.

5.1. Social Roles

In 1934 the United States Congress passed the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA), which was extended to Alaska two years later (Naske and Slotnick 1987: 217). The reception of the IRA was controversial among Native and non-Native Alaskans alike. On the one hand, it allowed for the creation of reservations in Alaska⁹¹, which would have resulted in the removal of land from the reach of non-Native Alaskans (Naske and Slotnick 1987: 116). At the same time, it created many concerns for Native people, who feared that the reservation provisions of the IRA would repeat the mistakes of the Lower 48 states. On the other hand, the IRA made it possible for Native communities to draw up constitutions for their self-government, allowing them “to adopt an appropriate constitution and bylaws” (Composite Indian Reorganization Act for Alaska 1936 Sec.16.), which, became effective after its ratification by the majority of tribal members and approved by the Secretary of the Interior.

Under these provisions Nanwalek (known then still as English Bay) created a seven member village council with a 1st and a 2nd chief, a treasurer, a secretary, and three general members, all of which were elected officials. While the idea of elected bureaucracy was a novel notion of self-governance for the people of Nanwalek, having two chiefs concurrently working together was not. According to local oral tradition (Interview with Natalie Kvasnikoff 2006) as well as archival material (Kenneth Cohen collection, Box 2, Folder 23) it was customary to have two chiefs in the village distributing the responsibilities of leadership.

Historically, Sugpiaq Alutiiq was a ranked society (Clark 1984, Crowell and Steffian and Pullar 2001, Jordan 1992, Townsend 1980, 1983) with social classes and clear distinctions of personal social standing. According to Saltonstall (2005), the ranked social system was, partially, a result of adaptation to maritime subsistence around 1500 AD, which allowed people living along the coasts of the Gulf of Alaska to store up

⁹¹ Although only a handful of reservations were created under the IRA, and after the early 1940's the reservation provision ceased to be in effect.

wealth resulting in the separation of the population into social classes. According to Russian sources, there were leadership positions in Sugpiaq Alutiiq communities, as well as people who were considered to be “commoners,” or members of lower classes, as well as slaves. This latter category mainly consisted of people captured during wars with surrounding communities, Sugpiaq and non-Sugpiaq alike.

Today, of course, there are no slaves, and the boundaries of social classes are not quite as rigid as described in historical sources, although social ranking does exist. There are people in the community who have more influence, even power, than others, as also more access to positions to power and authority than other members of the community. At present, the officials and the chiefs are elected to their positions, yet those individuals who get elected usually also have a personal standing in the community. It should also be added that not all individuals with authoritative or high standing get elected to office, partly because there are not enough positions (Ingold 1994: 948), and partly because in addition to considering personal standing, people also cast their vote based on who would be the best fit for that particular position, which I later describe in terms of the concept of charisma.

For these reasons, elected members of the council and officials are truly expected to “take care” of the people and work in their interest. Having secured a position and its privileges does not mean that it is irrevocable. Leaders have obligations towards people, which can be viewed as their “share” towards the community. It is not “sharing”, in the sense of voluntary contribution, but the leader’s “share” is what they need to provide in order to fulfill their social obligations associated with their social status. If a person chose not to share in this particular sense, his or her social standing declines. Correspondingly, if a person in an honored position ceases to act according to people’s expectations associated with that position, it is automatically regarded as forfeiture of that social standing. In that case, the particular individual would experience a quick decline in power, influence, authority, and even charisma as it is recognized by the members of the community.

In the past, community-wide decisions were made on an informal basis, without any official meeting or bureaucratic system. People in high social standing discussed matters amongst themselves while visiting one another, working together, or completing various projects and tasks in one another’s company. In a sense, this practice, which I

have referred to as “decisions made in an informal manner” in the previous chapter, is still prevalent and preferred in Nanwalek, although today people often use phones over personal visits when discussing problems or clarifying questions that involve the entire community.

In addition to the traditional understanding of social control and management, today the village council, essentially created on bureaucratic principles, also partakes in the governance sector of the community. The council holds regular meetings to delegate projects, manage the ongoing business of the village, to discuss problems that surface along the way, to plan future activities and programs, as well as to participate in resolving emergencies and sudden difficulties. Concurrently, the 1st chief personally attends to problems that are considered severe, and actively participates in decisions that affect the entire village. Interestingly, even in cases when contact with outside agencies is necessary, problems are often solved through indirect channels, such as in private gatherings of people with high personal status, and multiple discussions through phone calls and visits. At such times, the 1st chief acts both in his or her bureaucratic as well as social leadership capacities. These two functions are similar, yet not identical, with a nuanced difference that becomes pronounced during times involving the entire community. Such events may be caused by natural factors, such as storms, volcanic eruptions, floods etc, or can happen in situations when an outside agency proposes to bring a new project to the community. These projects are usually brought up for discussion in a formal bureaucratic setting, yet people often make up their minds through discussions within their social networks even before they arrive at the meetings.

In other situations, where only a portion of the community is affected, as for example personal disputes, quarrels between family members, or disagreements between community members associating with different social networks, it is usually the 2nd chief who gets involved. In addition to managing the everyday life of the village the 2nd chief also provides unofficial and official representation when the 1st chief is not available, and often mediates and provides updates for the first chief. For this reason the first chief has greater control over the involvement she or he wishes to take on in the everyday life of the village, as also has the option of selecting “discretionary” projects according to his or her interests in which she or he wishes to take an active part.

In my previous chapter I gave a short description of the various activities for children, which are largely organized and run by one of the past first chiefs of Nanwalek, Emilie. Being an accomplished artist, having the experience of teaching small children in the Sugtestun immersion school, and cultivating an extensive interest in historical and cultural aspects of the Native people of the area, Emilie, as chief, chose to be personally involved in many of the cultural projects of the village. She brought in funds for summer activities for the children, started up the local museum (historical depository), and actively supported the immersion school, amongst other programs. The current chief, Wally, has a thorough background in construction, supports local people's initiative for building their own homes instead of relying on outside help, and has a lifelong experience in living and subsisting in Nanwalek. Because of his personal interest, Wally chose to be personally involved in the recently started infrastructural projects in the community, specifically building roads in and around the village, and updating the water and sewer system.

The council and the chiefs are officially elected bureaucratic positions, yet the people who fill them also contribute their own personal status within the community to the position, and these two different concepts of authority and power cannot fully be separated from one another. The people who are part of the particular social network involved in forming decisions are all considered to have charisma, a high social standing, as well as their own social networks, in which they fulfill a leadership role. The examples I provided in the previous chapter suggest that these networks are quite flexible in extent and over time, yet they always have a core membership that is often based on kinship, but not necessarily on being closely related. Leaders of these networks, wielding authority and power in the community, also tend to be elected to fill the high ranking bureaucratic positions, although there are occasions when the situation is not so.

Persons who, by their temporary circumstances, are not considered to have a leadership position can acquire a bureaucratic position, yet it does not necessarily result in the advancement of their social standing in the community. Naturally, all networks that have leaders also need to have other members who are "being led" and most of these social roles within networks are ranked according to several factors, such as age, the nature of connection with other members, family status, personal characteristics, and charisma. Such social roles within a network are not only important for the community

because they tend to provide support for its members, as for example work-partners for completing chores, tasks, subsistence activities or for sharing resources, but are also significant for the social system of the village as a whole.

The various social roles people hold in Nanwalek are determined by several factors, which change according to advancement in age, family status, personal behavior and character, strategic choices in within and amongst networks, as also depend on the employment of personal talents including charisma. Therefore, I will explore these social factors in detail and offer examples demonstrating the way the ranked social system and the system of social networks complement one another. Additionally, I will also explore the social factors, which provide the basis for the ongoing re-interpretation of the traditional Sugpiaq understandings of power, authority, and social hierarchy in the contemporary life of the village.

5.1.1. The “Bureaucratic Enough” System

Authority and governance, and the conflicts that arise from the differences between local (traditional) community and outside bureaucratic perceptions and interpretations of the previous two concepts, have been the addressed in several studies in the past (Bourdieu 1986, Kowal 2008, Mosse 2005, Smith 1982, Tsing 1993, Weber 1947). Questions of management, sovereignty, and self-sufficiency are issues that correlate to problems originating from conflicting views on leadership and social hierarchy. For this reason, the practice of habitually drawing equivalences between the way small (often indigenous) communities express their needs and wants and that of larger bureaucratic entities is especially problematic. The practice of simplifying these bureaucratic protocols and channels of communications to the point that they all fit into a pre-arranged system becomes a problem precisely due to the fact that such practices systematically ignore the discrepancies between local and outside understandings of authority and governance, which are crucial elements of problem solving, sovereignty and self-sufficiency.

In the past decades the dominating paradigm regarding indigenous peoples was primarily preoccupied with the questions of self-determination and remedialism⁹² (Kowal 2008), to the point that a community of Native people became an expression of a group of individuals with a unanimous shared opinion. Yet, in reality, it is very rare that all members of the community formulate and hold a “unanimous opinion” on any issue. Native people are just as divided by different opinions and views as anyone else, and have different factions within the community based on many variable factors (such as age, status, wealth, relations etc.). Often these factions have different interests and needs that clash during the course of everyday life, and in fact, some of the issues can actually create followers and opponents in the village. It might be regarded as the natural state of communities to be in disorder (Gluckman 1968), as it fulfils social functions such as problem solving. Consequently it is important to recognize that if there is indeed a response that is presented as the “unanimous opinion” of a Native (or indigenous) community, it is, in actuality, a result of a series of negotiations⁹³.

The process of these negotiations is unquestionably idiosyncratic; the negotiations are largely conducted through traditional social networks and are based on local (or in Weberian terms “traditional”) notions of authority, which is usually quite differently construed from a bureaucratic understanding of authority. Weber sees the main source of difference between bureaucratic and traditional authority⁹⁴ in the connection of the administrative staff to the person wielding power. In traditional authority it is the relations of personal loyalty that evoke obedience in the administrative staff towards a leader, who occupies a position of authority by tradition (Weber 1947: 341), while in “legal” authority, the connection between the administrative staff and the leader is rationalized and becomes an “impersonal obligation of office” (Weber 1947: 330). To bridge over the divergences arising from these two concepts of leadership,

⁹² “The remedialism that drives postcolonial logic is the belief that the lives of Indigenous people, so badly affected by colonization, can be improved through reasoned intervention” (Kowal 2008: 341).

⁹³ Which concept cannot be separated from questions of authority in representation.

⁹⁴ “In the pure type of traditional authority, the following features of a bureaucratic administrative staff are absent: (a) a clearly defined sphere of competence subject to impersonal rules, (b) a rational ordering of relations of superiority and inferiority, (c) a regular system of appointment and promotion on the basis of free contracts, (d) technical training as a regular requirement, (e) fixed salaries, in the type case paid in money” (Weber 1947: 343).

people constantly negotiate and alter their approach to the official bureaucratic system. As indigenous communities now have been incorporated into nation states (Smith 1982: 504, Young 1993: 21), it is inevitable for them to adopt some form of bureaucratic system, which is the main means of communication, management, and implementation between the outside world and the local practices. State and federal officials do not deal with individuals whose status is not officiated according to their terms, but they do deal with a bureaucratic regime that is organized on non-local models, and which, incidentally, creates positions in the community that carry immense amount of outside authority.

In general, communities are quite efficient in synchronizing, but not synthesizing, the controversies arising from these two different approaches to authority. While local bureaucracy rarely becomes completely integrated into the traditional system that produces community wide opinions, it is contrived in a way to both leave room for the utilization of traditional social process in terms of authority and governance, and at the same time to fulfill the basic requirements of a bureaucratic system (Kowal 2008). The idea of having a bureaucratic executive office in a small indigenous community resonates with the idea of a “tribesman” (Tsing 1999), who is willing to change in order to participate in the bureaucratic system. Yet, he changes only to the point where his indigenous status can still be claimed. From the Native point of view however, the ideology is exactly the opposite. The goal is to construct a bureaucratic governance that is essentially Native (or traditional, or local), yet “bureaucratic enough” to fulfill the requirements of outside agencies, and power-ridden bureaucratic entities.

It is not an ideal arrangement, yet it serves a purpose on both ends, or in other words, it facilitates the maintenance of the flow of every day life in the village. Yet, it also becomes problematic when a closer working relationship is needed in solving problems specifically pertaining to the community. In the following example from the negotiations of a new airport for Nanwalek, I demonstrate how the local conceptualizations of authority and governance are by-passed based on hermeneutical differences between bureaucratic and traditional approaches to authority, creating a situation of inaptness for solving actual problems.

The “bureaucratic enough” system, based on the precarious balancing of traditional authority and its rationalized conveyance to, and for the use of, bureaucratic

organizations, is only viable and useful when it is not confronted directly with rationalized authority. Its main strength lies in the fact that it is, essentially, a system that operates on the basis of traditional authority, and produces actual results, which are in turn, presented in a rationalized manner towards the outside. Consequently, there is a great deal of interpretation involved in the operation of the “bureaucratic enough system”. There is an inevitable point in time, however, when the outside agency visits “inside,” and thoroughly disregards all that the local system has to offer.

The question of air transportation has been a constant problem and source of discussion for the community of Nanwalek for the past decades. During the winter months it is the only connection to the outside world and is seriously limited by the treacherous weather conditions to the point of isolating the community for days, or even weeks. It is also a great source of worry for the people of Nanwalek, as the small airplanes, combined with gusty winds and foggy weather, the mountainous terrain, and the ill appointed airport have resulted in numerous accidents and crashes in the area (9 in the last 20 years). During my over five years of involvement with the community I have never seen one local person who would not cross themselves and pray before take-off on the plane, and many in the village can recount a horror story of a flight, some of which end with actual crashes. Three of these crashes happened just after taking off from the airstrip which is located on a land strip between the ocean and the lagoon, surrounded by mountains. Simply put: there is no way in or out of Nanwalek that does not involve speeding towards a rocky wall in a small five seater-plane and sharply turning away what seems like only seconds from a crash.

So it is not surprising that the village wants a new airport. Actually, the village has been wanting the relocation of the airstrip for quite a while now, and the ongoing negotiations with the Department of Transportation (DOT) resulted in the form of a locally held reconnaissance meeting in 2006. A flyer (poster) announcing the date and location of the meeting was posted in advance, DOT representatives flew in on the day of the meeting, put on a PowerPoint presentation, asked questions from those who had turned up at the announced time, and distributed a questionnaire. Seemingly they were quite efficient, open for suggestions and very professional in the bureaucratic sort of way. From their point of view the meeting was a great success – they flew into a village, talked to the people, asked them questions, and then left with their data (which mostly were the

result of skewed questions). From the village's point of view however, they were just "another bunch of people who wanted something, but who would never listen".

It is not that the DOT did not want a new airport – they really did. Rather it is that they wanted the "Best airport for the Lowest Cost" (Jackinsky 2008). This basically meant that the new airport would be placed in between the two Sugpiaq villages on the coast, thereby cutting the DOT's expenses in half. For the locals (in both Port Graham and Nanwalek) this also means losing authority over their own decisions. Nanwalek did not want a shared airport because it would have required them to build a road system between the two villages. It was an incorrect presumption on the part of the people representative of the DOT that the villages want to be connected based on their shared cultural heritage. True, people in the two villages are culturally related (and often by blood or marriage as well), yet they want to maintain their ability to control travel between the villages, and also between the outside world. Should one village decide to build a road or run a ferry to the nearby town of Homer, it would open up a new set of social problems for the other community as well. Additionally, people from both communities would have to drive to the new airport, losing further control over the incoming visitors and goods, as well as precious time in case of medical emergencies, not to mention the added cost of fuel. It is clear that the Best for the Lowest cost does not refer to the people the airport is being built for, rather to the DOT "visionaries [who] think about the future" (Jackinsky 2008).

During the DOT meeting, locals expressed their concerns in great detail and suggested several alternative sites for the new airport, all of which were in close proximity of the village. The response was less than encouraging. While the DOT representatives promised to keep those sites under consideration, people were convinced that their opinions would not be considered in the decision, providing them with yet another "wonderful amenity" that in the long run would cause more social problems (in addition to diminished emergency care and increased maintenance costs) and at the same time they would be expected to be thankful for it.

In reality it is not that people living in Nanwalek do not want to participate in the various grants and programs offered by state and federal agencies. Rather, they want to be able to decide for themselves which one they really want to bring in to the village. They want to be able to have authority over their own lives and corresponding choices.

They also want to be able to participate in the process in a way that allows room for local understanding and interpretation so that instead of just aiming for following prescribed, rationalized, bureaucratic protocol, the real goal would be to provide a solution that actually works.

Naturally, it would be quite false to portray the people of Nanwalek, or any Native (or indigenous) community for that matter, as helpless victims with no desire or ability to actively participate in shaping their own future. After all, these are the people who learned to use remedialism to their advantage in creating a “bureaucratic enough system” for the perusal of the outside agencies. In this specific case people have already remarked that they would keep using the old airport if the idea of a shared airport becomes implemented. In that situation the DOT would have wasted a large amount of money on an airport that nobody uses, and probably would be completely baffled by people’s reaction. Not to mention the fact that this scenario would falsely portray the community as irrational troublemakers juxtaposed against the federal agency reinforced by their bureaucratic armor of rationality. This system has no understanding of or interest in any type of local conceptualization of authority or networks and in finding solutions for problems, resulting in the constant reproduction of misconceptions and miscommunications that create problems both within and on the outside.

Naturally, people living in small communities such as Nanwalek realize this, and develop a system that is bureaucratic enough to establish some kind of connections with the outside world. The difference between traditional authority and bureaucratic authority is especially highlighted in comparison to the connection between religious conceptualization and social understandings of power and authority.

5.2. On Charisma

In the Encyclopedia of Sociology Borgatta (1992: 152) outlined the relationship between power and authority, based on Weber’s approach, as power representing “the ability or capacity to have other people behave in accordance with certain orders or dictates” while authority representing the legitimation of this power. Hunter and Whitten (1976: 70) take a slightly different approach to the relationship between power and authority, by including the notion of influence in their definition. ‘Authority’ representing

“an ability to control other by virtue of office” and ‘influence’ referring to an “ability to control without the benefit of office,” are both components of power. In this sense “influence” suggests a strictly personal interpretation of power, whereas “authority” can be interpreted as power connected to the individual occupying an office in conjunction with the power connected directly to that office. Hunter and Whitten continue with explaining the notion of leadership by differentiating between actual leadership and titular authority, the later suggesting only ceremonial authority (1976: 70). In this approach ‘ceremonial authority’ is closely connected to power exercised “by virtue of office,” while ‘actual leadership’ is something more personal. This distinction also highlights the difference between the two types of charisma: personal and institutionalized. Both forms of charisma are associated with the idea of leadership; yet while personal charismatic leaders “communicate normative messages for which they are the primary authors” (Bird 1993: 76), leadership in institutionalized charisma (or charisma of office) “pertains to beliefs that certain officeholders, by virtue of occupying a sacred office (e.g. priesthood), acquire certain special powers and qualities” (Robbins 1998).

Distinguishing between the charisma of office and personal charisma does not negate the presence of power in both concepts, in spite of the fact that the first comprehensive discussion of charisma put forth by Weber focused mainly on the later approach. Naturally, it is impossible to discuss the concept of charisma without exploring Max Weber’s contribution; yet it would be a mistake to limit the understanding of charisma only to the Weberian usage.

Charisma has been redefined and reinterpreted within social science discourse from a multitude of different perspective (e.g. Adair-Toteff 2005, Beyer 1999, Clark 2006, Feuchtwang 1997, Geertz 1983, Goossaert 2008, Shils 1982, Swatos 1984, Trice and Beyer 1986, Turner 2003, Willner 1984) most of which evolved around realizing and reformulating Weber’s application. Geertz (1983: 121-122) explains this phenomenon by “the tendency [...] to ease the weight of [Weber’s] thought by collapsing it into one of its dimensions, most commonly the psychological [one].” Others (Turner 2003: 6) argue that the importance of exploring the concept of charisma should be approached based on the shift, including its popularization in everyday life, transpired in the past several decades.

From this point of view the significance of charisma derives from the changes in social application, making the concept less abstract and more comprehensive.

This approach is especially reflected in the “new paradigm” of charismatic leadership studies (Beyer 1999), where the focus is not on the “extraordinariness” of charismatic qualities, but on the everyday manifestation and general configuration of personal characteristics. In this sense charisma can be viewed as a constant element of power and authority, because it cannot be separated from the idea of centralized institution (Feuchtwang 1997: 93). Charisma, viewed as a constant, albeit not constantly apparent, element of social life (Geertz 1983: 123) is a response to the power exuded by a central authority.

Most approaches to the study of charisma in social science agree that it is an elusive concept. Nevertheless, due to the correlations of charisma to questions of power, authority, leadership and relationships in social hierarchy, the concept of charisma highlights elements of social life pertaining to the significance and enactment of social networks. It is always helpful to look at locally used expressions in delineating social life because it helps to comprehend how locals “think about the things they feel and how their understandings figure both in social practice and psychological process” (Rosaldo 1983: 139). Alas, in this case, it is not to be. ‘Charisma’, as an expression, is never mentioned or used to describe social relations in Nanwalek. When people talk about individuals who are in a leadership position with a community-wide acknowledged authority and power, the phrase usually used to describe such people is “nice”; as in, somebody being a really nice person. If hard pressed for details, people reluctantly might add the word ‘respect’; yet, it is articulated in an inconclusive manner and happens only on rare occasions. In this case the act of avoidance from putting the idea into words is an expression in itself. What I know refer to as charisma is not said but enacted and collectively understood in Nanwalek. In public, people firmly hold with the official agenda of acknowledging this unnamed quality that imbues power, authority, leadership and even legitimacy on certain people. Naturally, people also realize that charisma, similarly to power, is not good or bad in itself; but because it is regarded as a desirable quality in their social context the description of it as “nice” effectively expresses their affirmation. Breaking from the official approach would negate the otherwise accepted (charismatic) quality as desirable. As people enact this desirable quality through social interactions driven by

acknowledgment of power, authority, leadership, and social hierarchy, I use the term charisma to explore social roles and status in Nanwalek.

Charisma, as a quality conveying ideas of power and authority, is also an important theological concept of Russian Orthodoxy, which closely relates specifically to the concept of institutionalized charisma. Therefore in the pages to follow, first I concentrate on the current manifestation and role that charisma plays in the social life of Nanwalek, through discussing personal and institutionalized charisma; secondly, I connect the concept of charisma to the notions of achieved and ascribed social status, with emphasis on its role within social networks.

5.2.1. Personal Charisma

In the Weberian tripartite system of authority, rational (or legal, or bureaucratic) authority is based on the idea of legality, traditional authority is centered on the people's "belief in the sanctity" of traditions, whereas charismatic authority originates from devotion to a person with exemplary character (Weber 1947: 328). In particular, the concept of charisma is "applied to a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers and qualities" (Weber 1947: 358). Although this prominent definition is almost always used in analysis which highlights the "supernatural" nature of the charismatic leader and his or her authority, it is important to recognize that Weber himself did not consider this religious connection a prerequisite for charismatic leadership. True, his ideal charismatic leader is the prophet (Weber 1947: 361), yet the definition itself acknowledges the existence of charismatic leaders who, if they do not possess a supernatural connection, at least have exceptional qualities. The emphasis here is on pointing out the possibility of applying charisma without a clear supernatural connotation (Shils 1982: 121) (which has been the case in the colloquial usage of the term), and not denying the more conventional applications.

After all, charismatic authority linked with supernatural forces was most likely a dominant social factor in pre-contact Sugpiaq society, where shamans with a variety of specialization held prominent power-positions in the social arena. Even today, within Russian Orthodoxy, the notion of charisma is prevalent; it is considered as a special gift

from the Holy Spirit providing guidance for leaders in the Church (Ware 1997: 248), and it is often associated with the Saints of the Orthodox Church. Nevertheless, charisma is often used in connotation with spiritual power (Hunter and Whitten 1976: 70), and for some, charisma cannot be separated from the numinous (Geertz 1983: 143, Turner 2003: 20).

According to Weber charisma is “sharply opposed to both rational, and particularly bureaucratic, authority, and to traditional authority, whether in its patriarchal, patrimonial, or any other form” (1947: 361) on the basis of charismatic authority being a “specifically revolutionary force” (Weber 1947: 362).⁹⁵ Consequently Weber saw an inherent irreconcilability between charisma and any form of routinization concerned with questions of inheritance (of power). He assumed that charisma automatically disappears through routinization to traditional authority, because the two concepts represent two different kinds of forces; charisma being revolutionary while traditional authority is regulatory.

Following Weber’s approach charisma is viewed as an unstable form of authority and power (Robbins and Anthony 1995), because it is based on a specific relationship between a leader and his or her followers (Swatos 1995, Winick 1975), which connection is emotional, irrational and in general, “risky” (Beyer 1999: 321). Yet, charisma can also be approached from the point of view of risk evaluation (Turner 2003: 16). The actions of a charismatic leader, whether by being exceptional or original, can provide novel possibilities for potential followers. People evaluate these new options together with the new risks they entail, and subsequently opt to follow the leader, now perceived as charismatic (Turner 2003: 5). Therefore, the recognition of charisma is a social act, which is also closely related to cultural values (Beyer 1999: 310); hence it can only be defined in idiosyncratic terms. This fact however does not preclude the realization of the most important aspect of charisma: its enigmatic origin, the fact that some people have it, while others do not⁹⁶.

Weber describes charisma as a (personal) characteristic, which can “only be ‘awakened’ and ‘tested’; it cannot be ‘learned’ or ‘taught’” (Weber 1947: 367). He also

⁹⁵ Weber described charismatic leadership as the “rule of genius” (1947: 362).

⁹⁶ And even those with charisma are not always recognized as such due to particular social-cultural circumstances.

emphasizes the fact that the activation of a leader's charisma depends on the followers' recognition and acknowledgment, without which the relationship emanating authority would not exist (Weber 1968: 61). Yet personal charisma, due to its dependence on the intimate relationship between leader and followership, is not only highly unstable, but also impossible to rationalize or maintain in the absence of the leader. Thus, in the Weberian approach, charismatic authority is transitory, and if it becomes permanent, charismatic authority is unavoidably traditionalized or rationalized (Weber 1947: 364).

In reality, however, charisma does not disappear, and more importantly, it is an active factor in any kind of authority and power relation. The problem with Weber's approach is that he regarded traditional authority as static, in opposition to the transitional charismatic authority, which is not affected by shifting power relations discounting any possibilities of future charismatic leaders. The process of routinization, according to Weber, includes, but is not limited to, solving the problem of inheritance, which is a significant aspect of traditional leadership, converting one kind of authority to another. In his example for traditional leadership he assumes that the appointed heir automatically takes over, or fills, the now routinized leadership position, therefore embodying the antithesis of a charismatic leader.

In this approach the concept of charisma cannot be conceived as a desirable leadership characteristic in a particular social (and historical) context (Turner 2003: 13). According to Weber's approach to authority, the routinization of charismatic authority automatically changes the nature of the authority. In reality, if this sequence of automatic transformation between types of authority was true, history would not be crowded with inheritance wars followed by decentralization until the appearance of a new leader on the political scene, in possession of that particular desirable characteristic,⁹⁷ which is, in that particular cultural framework regarded as charisma. For this reason, it is possible to have a social system where charisma is a dominant and constant element of leadership, a desirable trait, yet still routinized to the point that it becomes "traditional" for a particular group of people. In this sense, charisma plays an important role in maintaining continuity, and does not need to be contradictory to other kinds of authority.

⁹⁷ Which is admired, feared, or sometimes evokes both reactions at the same time. More importantly, it is perceived as a characteristic of prestige.

Geertz's description of Mulay Hassan's rule in Morocco depicts such a case, where the idea of culturally embedded charisma was inseparably connected to the king's authority. In order to maintain his central authority, a king had to constantly circulate amongst lesser centers of power, as to constantly prove and re-claim his superiority based on his possession of the magical idea of *baraka* (Geertz 1983: 136-138). When the king stopped moving, thus ceased to continually prove his "special gift" to other players in the political arena, his authority also declined. In this sense the concept of *baraka*, "gift of power" or charisma, was an inherent, inalienable aspect of Moroccan cultural conceptualization of political leadership and social life.

The Sugpiaq notion of power is also largely dependent on the concept of charisma in conceptualizing leadership. While the Sugpiaq is a ranked society, social ranking does not involve a rigid, impermeable hierarchical system. To the contrary, because social ranking is equally formulated based on inherited social status and individual talents, leadership positions are attainable to many in the community. The authority of personal charisma can be the vehicle of social advancement, if it is recognized as such by others. In this sense charisma has a symbolic value for Sugpiaq people, which is connected to notions of power and authority. Bourdieu reflects on the importance of the symbolic value of charisma, which Weber would have seen "had [Weber] not been trapped in the logic of realist typologies. This leads him to see charisma as a particular form of power rather than as a dimension of all power, that is, another name for legitimacy" (Bourdieu 1980: 141). Legitimacy, however, is only acquired by "recognition" of charisma as "virtue" in the social arena (Bourdieu 1980: 141), where charisma is a constant element of continually changing power relations.

Leach describes charisma as "divine grace" (1982: 227), a gift bestowed upon some, who often come to hold leadership positions. This interpretation redirects the concept of charisma to its often noted correlation with religiosity, precisely because of the uncertainties it evokes. Charisma in societies with traditional authority can be thought of as a supernatural or numinous (whether specifically divine or in general spiritual) gift that manifests in everyday life through certain persons with extraordinary characteristics that are viewed and considered desirable in attaining leadership. In bureaucratic systems, however, where positions are created on a rational basis, there is no room for the numinous; thus charisma is simply viewed as a talent for social, and political,

leadership⁹⁸. Through this interpretation charisma becomes social capital, because its origins are of less concern than the way it can be used to make strategic choices. Yet, charisma can also be viewed as symbolic capital, in any kind of social system based on its general connections to power and legitimacy, because when explicitly connected with culture specific symbolic meanings, it expresses both its culturally conceptualized origin and its social implications.

If the notion of charisma is regarded as inherently part of all understandings of power, Weber's approach regarding the "extraordinariness," in the sense of not being part of the "ordinary world," of the charismatic leader no longer explains the connection between charisma and authority. Even in Weber's approach power originates from authorities that are routinized, one of which may have a spiritual or sacralized aspect, similarly to charismatic authority. Consequently, traditional authority and charismatic authority share the characteristic of being able to derive its power from a numinous origin. Whereas it is impossible to rationalize the concept of charisma, bureaucratic authority is created on the basis of rationalization, therefore these two concepts are still largely contradictory to one another. Contrary to bureaucratic authority, traditional authority does not seek to rationalize charisma, but rather uses it in creating legitimacy. For this reason, charisma is not completely alien to central institutions of society organized on the basis of sacred, spiritual or religious concepts, which is expressed in the concept of institutionalized charisma (or charisma of office).

5.2.2. Charisma of Office

The concept of the charisma of office was first put forth by Edward Shils in "The Constitution of Society," as a part of his general discussion on the idea of sacred in society. Although Shils acknowledges the validity of Weber's personal charisma, he also points out that 'institutional' charisma is very different in nature:

⁹⁸ Naturally charisma is present in some ways in all forms of power including bureaucratic power especially in the highest levels of bureaucracy. It is enough to consider a simple example of a political election to realize that even a bureaucratic system founded on rational principles cannot escape the concept.

...it is not a charisma deduced from the creativity of the charismatic individual. It is inherent in the massive organization of authority. The institutional charismatic legitimation of a command emanating from an incumbent of a role in a corporate body derives from membership in the body as such, apart from any allocated, specific powers (Shils 1982: 131).

In Shils' approach, the charisma of office not necessarily religious or spiritual in nature, especially in a bureaucratic setting, yet it is always conceived based on the idea of "tremendous power" which is larger than the individual and is held by a central institution. Turner suggests that Shils' institutional charisma is closer in origin to the religious understanding of charisma, than to the Weberian understanding. He draws this conclusion based on the idea that leaders are often viewed as having a divine or religious association, which can "be seen as a result of the fact that they embody in themselves something greater and more sacred than themselves" (Turner 2003: 11).

When the charisma of office is compared with the idea of the theory of infallibility in the Orthodox Church I described in chapter one (or the theory of Papal Infallibility for that matter), there are striking similarities to be found between the two concepts. According to the theory of infallibility members of the Church as individuals are sinful, because they are human, yet when they come together in the Church, and form the Church as the body of Christ, as an entity they are sinless, because Christ is sinless. Through the charisma of office individuals do not have (or are not required to have) personal charisma in order to be a part of a larger institution, which in fact does have charisma based on its overarching authority that is much more than an individual alone.

Geertz (1983:124) remarks that "the gravity of high politics and the solemnity of high worship spring from like impulses than might first appear" in his discussion on the correlations between the symbolics of power and the nature of power in regards to charisma that is a part of the center of society and not an opposing revolutionary reaction to it. Charisma, as symbolic capital, interpreted within a cultural context, and regardless of its conceptualized origin, can work "properly" in a social context only if it is socially acknowledged by all participants (Leach 1982: 228). It does not do any good to have charisma (divine or not) if others in the social group do not realize and acknowledge it as something special, something desirable, something prestigious.

Charisma is understood not only as social but also as symbolic capital in Nanwalek. In the ranked social system, charisma allows social actors to advance in social status, which, again, is interpreted within the extensive system of social networks. The fabric of the social networks is the hierarchical relationship of its members enacted, reinforced, and expressed by balancing various kinds of obligations: favors, responsibilities, debts and credits. Charisma in social networks is a combined understanding of personal and institutionalized charisma, as social advancement is realized based on the notions of both achieved and ascribed status. Today these networks are infused with religious connections and connotations as well, which makes it important to understand the theological concept of charisma from the viewpoint of Russian Orthodoxy.

Charisma in Orthodoxy is understood as a 'special gift' from the Holy Spirit (Ware 1997: 249). Although charisma is bestowed upon a bishop at the time of his consecration, others, including laity, can also experience this grace. It can manifest itself in a variety of ways, one of which is the concept of *startsy*, the ministry of 'eldership' in specifically Russian Orthodox tradition (Ware 1997: 250)⁹⁹. Also, the concept of charisma is frequently evoked in connection with Saints of the Orthodox Church, who are often considered to have a certain kind of special gift, one of which is the gift of theology. As the Orthodox Church combines the otherworldly and worldly aspects, and simultaneously includes the living and the dead, Saints are looked upon as leaders of the Church. They show an example to people through their lives, as well as intercede on behalf of those who pray to them. Theology, the teaching by writing and speaking of "God as Trinity," is intimately connected "to vigilance and prayer, as well as to the received pure prayer of the church [without which it is] a dry and rationalistic exercise

⁹⁹ Elders, or *startsy*, play a unique role in Russian Orthodoxy, combining the functions of a spiritual father, a teacher, a confessor, a living ideal, and a healer, who, by the grace of God and through his own spiritual journey had obtained the highest level of enlightenment on this world, yet, he remains approachable and available for the people (Pascal 1976: 44). A *starets* is often a lay monk, who decides to leave the monastery to live in solitude spending his time with constant meditation and prayer, and after a period of time he also receives visitors who wish to consult him. The process of becoming a *starets* is not regulated, since it is not an official post within the Church, rather, it happens spontaneously, by receiving charisma, and its subsequent recognition by the people. *Startsy*, by their virtue and devotion, acquire special faculties, such as reading people's hearts, which they use in aid of those seeking spiritual guidance. One of Alaska's most venerated saints, St. Herman was such a *starets*, who withdrew to Spruce Island establishing an orphanage, and a refuge for those in need, as well as providing consolation for Natives and Russians alike.

alongside the many other theoretical sciences” (Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I. 2004: 6). In this sense, the special gift of charisma, after being bestowed on a person, needs to be cultivated and acted upon by the person’s human will; otherwise it can be “taken away”. Moreover, charisma cannot be rationalized, because, “the spiritual life cannot be reduced to the mind, as if it were an intellectual concept” (Father Sophrony of Essex in Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I. 2004: 5). Therefore, charisma in the Orthodox Church is clearly viewed as “divine grace,” lending a position of authority to those who receive and apply it.

Authority through strict hierarchy is probably one of the most recognized characteristics of the Orthodox Church. Although the Orthodox Church is organized in a hierarchical basis, it is “not monarchical in structure, centered round a single hierarch; it is collegial, formed by the communion of many hierarchs with one another, and of each hierarch with the members of the church” (Ware 1997: 246). On the parish level however, the hierarchy of church structure is more pronounced. Because the church is understood as the “theology of communion” (Ware 1997: 246), the most important factor that holds the people in a church together is the shared act of taking communion¹⁰⁰. Each of these churches is under the leadership of a priest, who is the representative of a bishop (hierarch). Yet, when a bishop is consecrated, and the special gift of charisma is bestowed upon him, the congregation’s consent is acknowledged by the expression *axios!* (he is worthy) (Ware 1997: 291). In this sense, the charisma of a hierarch originates from the Holy Spirit, but it is bestowed on the bishop so it can be used in the community of the Church, for the benefit of the people of God. Or as Ware points out: “bishop and people are joined in an organic unity, and neither can properly be thought of apart from the other” (Ware 1997: 250). Consequently the notion of charisma is simultaneously religious and social, creating a unity by linking together two aspects of human existence.

The authority of the church in the Weberian tripartite system is regarded as traditional authority. Yet, from Shils’ point of view, a church’s authority can be viewed as institutionalized charisma, because the “officials” of the church are “‘representative’ of the organization ‘as a whole’ [and as such] some of the [church’s] charisma is attributed” to the individuals holding official positions in the church (Shils 1982: 132).

¹⁰⁰ In this sense, each church celebrating the Divine Liturgy *is* the Orthodox Church.

It is also very similar to the Sugpiaq understanding of charisma, both in historical and in contemporary contexts, because it has a numinous origin and a value, or symbolic capital, only in a social context. The seemingly dual nature of charisma, combining the sacred and the profane, in actuality is not at all divided. Again, in Orthodoxy the concept of church encompasses *both* the living and the dead, the visible and the invisible world. Therefore those in the Orthodox faith are always Orthodox, whether they are in the Church or outside of it. According to Orthodox interpretation, they do not have a life outside of the Church, so their actions and behaviors are interpreted in this context from the Church's point of view. This resonates with the Sugpiaq understanding of leadership and authority as well. As I mentioned in chapter one, Sugpiaq people, akin to many other Native (or indigenous) peoples with a shamanistic tradition, had their own ideas of the numinous¹⁰¹, and it is highly unlikely that religious phenomena were regarded as detached concepts from other aspects of life.

Hence the concept of charisma in leadership is an analogy between Sugpiaq and Orthodox views on authority, which is conceptualized according to an idiosyncratic cultural context. Whereas the charisma of office, by Shils' definition is not limited to traditional authority, and can be present in a bureaucratic organizations as well (Shils 1982: 132), I believe that there is a difference between the traditional and the bureaucratic understandings of charisma, based on their opposing conceptualizations of the numinous (or religious, divine, magical, supernatural, spiritual etc). In traditional authority charisma needs not to be separated from the numinous, while in bureaucratic authority charisma cannot retain its numinous characteristics, because it cannot be rationalized. Again, the origin of charisma, when separated from the numinous, becomes nothing more than a personality trait in individuals, and can be present in the structure of bureaucratic organizations only in varying degrees (Shils 1982: 123). Charisma cannot be fully rationalized, because its origin cannot be fully explained, and even Shils explain it in terms of *tremendum mysteriosum*, and a general need for order (Shils 1982: 129). At the same time, Shils acknowledges that charisma can, and does, influence the hierarchical

¹⁰¹ It is impossible to fully reconstruct the Sugpiaq conceptualizations of the numinous today; however, based on oral history, oral tradition, stories, songs, and customs, it is possible to ascertain that people had several different types of shamans and healers, had elaborate ideas regarding the afterlife, and were intrigued by various manifestations of the "paranormal."

system of a society and the authority emanating from the acknowledgment of charisma prompt deference towards those in power (Shils 1982: 135).

This is exactly the point that becomes significant in examining the social life of Nanwalek, where people combine personal charisma with that of the charisma of office, in conjunction with combining ascribed and achieved status in perceiving and realizing social hierarchy. The main significance is not in the recognition of differences in between the different types of charisma, rather in the perception of their similarities. In a cultural framework where charisma, as a source for authority and power, was already understood as a part of social life, people were attuned to realizing the similarities of charisma understood in the social structure of the Orthodox Church. It was an analogy that they perceived based on their own conceptualizations of the connections between authority and charisma on a social level, which prompted the opportunities to create a point of comprehension in internalizing the theological understandings of charisma in Orthodoxy.

Consequently, the hierarchical structure of the Russian Orthodox Church, constructed on the basis of the charisma of office within traditional authority, resonates with the Sugpiaq understandings, which allows people living in Nanwalek to continually reorganize their expansive system of social networks, including the ones created based on religious ideology. Social networks in Nanwalek accommodate both kinship based (fictive and actual) and religious connections (such as godparents, wedding sponsors, priests being addressed as “father” and their spouses as “little mother”), providing people with opportunities to create an additional level of reinforcement of their personal social standing in the village. Having clarified the correlations between charisma, power, and authority, I continue with exploring the local interpretation of social standing, and the significance of charisma in the social hierarchy of Nanwalek.

5.3. Status: Achieved or Ascribed?

In political anthropology questions of status are usually described in terms of being ascribed or achieved; the former referring to a status that is “inborn,” not chosen or based on merit, while the latter refers to a particular status that is earned through various venues idiosyncratic to a cultural context. This latter type of status, that is closely associated with the successful utilization of personal characteristics in securing a

position, as well as with greater social mobility, can be seen as an opportunity to realize personal charisma as it, in part, creates power, authority, and social control within social networks in Nanwalek. While it is clear that social status in Nanwalek (and perhaps in Sugpiaq society in general) is definitely closer to the idea of being “achieved” than “ascribed,” in this sub-chapter I go further in my analysis. I suggest that in addition to achieving a status, one also has to claim it in order to take full possession of it before it becomes a meaningful constituent of the social system.

The idea of focusing on the process of taking possession of a particular status is not new. Riches (1984: 235) contemplates the question of whether “prestige is best seen as a resource or as a moral value” in his study of three northern societies¹⁰². While critiquing the transactionalist approach, where prestige is regarded as a resource which can be achieved by performing certain activities, Riches points out that prestige should be regarded as a moral value, because it is not the action that secures prestige for the individual, rather the circulation of the action as news within the community, and the approval it evokes from other members. In this sense prestige is secured (achieved) “on the assumption that such information has been conveyed” (Riches 1984: 235-236) and claimed (acquired) through the course of multiple interactions enacted with the shared knowledge of this information. Additionally, I concur with Riches in his statement that prestige and the values associated with it cannot be separated from other cultural ideas and values, which is also a dominant factor of Silverman’s (1966) investigation on the meaning of *rispetto* in an Italian community. Silverman points out that the enactment and acknowledgement of *rispetto*, which he approximates to have a meaning of prestige, can be expressed through a multitude of cultural venues (such as behavior, address, speech patterns, etc), which can all be best “understood as a habitual response-readiness with which one approaches another member of the society” (Silverman 1966: 906).

Naturally the idea of prestige and that of social status are not equivalent; rather prestige, as a moral value, is embedded in and associated with high-ranking social status. Through the shared acknowledgment of a person’s action in a community, prestige, which manifests in its association with a particular social status, can be achieved, and by

¹⁰² Prestige is not regarded here as an equivalent of charisma. Charisma, when viewed as a desirable characteristic, can be associated with prestige, a high social status in a particular social-cultural framework.

its subsequent enactment in interactions within the particular social system, claimed. In Nanwalek society, such social status that is achieved and subsequently claimed is done on the basis of “charismatic qualities,” similarly to other Native American conceptualizations of power relations (Harkin 1996: 286). The deference prompted by the perception and acknowledgment of charisma, both in personal and institutional forms, is enacted on a daily basis and governs social interactions I described in chapters three and four. Furthermore, due to its previously demonstrated connection to deference in observing social status differences, the concept of charisma is central in the creation, existence and cultivation of social networks.

Being a leader in a community entails privileges, prerogatives, and responsibilities. Interestingly these concepts are not contradictory to one another, rather they are complimentary in the sense that a person fulfilling certain positions needs to be aware of all ideas, customs, and expectations that are associated with that particular social standing. For example, the status of a chief is acknowledged and reinforced by various actions that are carried out in the context of complying with local customs. When hunters come back from a successful hunt for seal, sea lion, bear or moose, they often give the best piece of meat to the chief, as a share, a social obligation (Bodenhorn 2000b). Sometimes the chief might receive other kinds of subsistence foods as well (as for example the first fish of the season or seagull eggs, which one has to travel to nearby islands to get) and it is always given to him as a gift and received with delight and appreciation. People know exactly why these gifts or “fringe benefits” (Leach 1982: 174) are given and received, yet the underlying reason of social status is never pronounced openly, which reinforces the nature of social interaction that “works by innuendo”. Similarly, during Christmas time described in chapter three, Starring always starts at the chief’s house, regardless of its location in the village. The people following the Star go directly from the Church to the current chief’s home, where the year’s first singing and blessing commences. In turn, the chief and his or her family provide an exceptional feast for all the singers, which usually includes subsistence foods collected and prepared with care, homemade desserts and cookies, candy, drinks, and some form of meat dish (because fasting is over when the first star appears on the sky).

The ability and the proportion of providing for the community is closely linked to personal status and everybody need to participate according to his or her roles. People do

not expect large dinners during Starring from people who are not in leadership positions. In fact, people do not want to see others provide beyond their means and their social standing. It is the prerogative of the chief and other leaders to give lavish feasts, or to go to the extremes when providing for everyone in the village; it is a measure, an acknowledgment, and an enactment of social standing within society, and as such, it is reserved for those who have adequately achieved and subsequently claimed it. If leaders fail to comply with the expectations associated with their role, their social status suffers (Weber 1947: 360), and if others try to mimic these actions that are beyond their current social standing, they are, at the least, disparaged. A particular social status has to be achieved before it can be successfully claimed by compliance with people's expectations associated with it.

One of the specific expectations people in Nanwalek have towards their leaders is providing for the individuals in the community when they have the ability to do so. Yet, "a high level of social responsibility [is] balanced with a great degree of personal freedom" (Briggs 2000: 112) in fulfilling this social obligation. For example, before the winter of 2008, Wally, the current first chief of the village, made several trips up the trail with his tractor and dragged down logs for everyone who needed them in order to help people start building a woodpile before the snow set in. This was a big help for the families who use wood stoves in conjunction with their oil heating in order to cut cost and to keep the houses warm during snowstorms, extreme winds, and at times when the electricity is out (which can happen several times during the winter months).

In this particular case Wally wanted to make sure that nobody was going without a basic resource needed to get through the winter months, and his action perfectly resonated with people's ideas on the social role of a chief. Naturally, getting wood was also carried out within a particular cultural and historical context. When asking them about their childhood experiences, Elders often recount stories where they were ordered ("they were let") to gather and chop wood for their grandparents, parents, uncles and aunts, and in general for all the, then, Elders of the village (Brewster 2004: 7). They also often remember large parties of men or women helping out each other in gathering resources, such as wood for winter. Back then, a group of men would haul wood down from the trail to build a firewood pile at each of their houses, taking turns in their delivery until everybody was set for the cold to come. Back then, the community was also much

smaller; to be precise, the population was approximately a third of the current one. Therefore it is not difficult to see that mutual dependence on one another brought virtually everybody in the village into close contact. Today, people still work together, and in some cases, even on a community-wide scale, such as getting wood, yet for the most part it would be impossible to fulfill every household's needs concurrently. To alleviate the burden of completing chores, and to be able to attend to multiple tasks at the same time, people nowadays often draw on the support system provided by their networks.

In the previous chapters I demonstrated the mechanism of social networks at work through multiple examples, such as kinship relations, recognizing and acting on opportunities, providing a support system, and that they are the *sine qua non* in following local etiquette. These instances all highlight the concentric nature of the networks (Anderson 1998: 66), which are built around a person of high status, often holding a leadership position, and who is also surrounded by other members of his or her social network in constantly widening concentric circles that are based on a hierarchical ranking. It is important to realize that there is quite a bit of room for social mobility, and peoples' social roles, standing, and status change throughout their lives several times.

An individual's position in society is influenced by several factors constituting personal social capital, which in the context of the social network system translates to the ability of creating "credential" and subsequent "credit" in the Bourdieuan sense of the word (1986: 51). This "social credit," derived from its connotation of social capital, is constructed in a variety of ways in Nanwalek and like social capital, it needs to be "endlessly affirmed and reaffirmed" (Bourdieu 1986: 52) by continuous (social) exchanges in its reproduction to be recognized within, and by the members of, the social networks.

Then again, there is also an ascribed element in realizing social status in Nanwalek. Being born to a family immediately situates a person within the social hierarchy, which resonates with the idea of ascribed status. Yet, families with authority change over time; some lose importance by dwindling away, or even completely dying out, by making unfortunate social alliances, or by having less charismatic members within a certain time frame. Others can gain power and importance in the community by

increasing in number, having descendents endowed with charisma, or having other abilities that are advantageous for the community during their lifetimes.

Ingold (1994: 948) describes ranked society as “local polities [with] ritual and political leaders who acquire their positions on the basis of traditional principles that rank individuals with respect to each other.” Ingold also adopts Fried’s (1967: 109) view that “not all those of sufficient talent to occupy such statuses actually achieve them.” Both of these statements, in general, can be used to describe the social hierarchy in Nanwalek. The logic behind the “traditional principle,” which is culture specific, in the case of Nanwalek can be viewed in terms of charisma and the role it plays in social ranking.

The most plausible explanation for Sugpiaq Alutiiq ranked social system is a combination of two main factors: a favorable environmental condition allowing hierarchies to develop in a relatively larger population group, and interaction between Sugpiaq Alutiiq and the more egalitarian Yupik and/or the more stratified North West Coast people (Tlingit, Eyak, Haida, etc.) (Schweitzer 2003: 91-92). While Townsend (1980) described the societies of the Alaska Pacific Rim as ranked, with hierarchical structures, ultimately separating the Sugpiaq Alutiiq from their more egalitarian Yupik neighbors, and the more stratified North West Coast neighbors, she came to the conclusion that social status within this ranked system carried authority without the power to coerce (Townsend 1980: 130). Based on the examples I provided in the previous chapters, it is clear that her postulation is only partially correct in the case of Nanwalek. For example, the mode of communication, which is based on conflict avoidance generally associated with more egalitarian social organization certainly suggest the absence of coercion. Yet, the phrase “I’m gonna let you do this” is actually a way of exercising coercion toward a very specific segment of population; toward those people who are in a lower social status. Coercion here is a combination of personal authority and social control; and the effectiveness of coercion varies according to the specific relationships embedded in the social hierarchy.

For this reason, in addition to ascribed status, there is also an achieved aspect of understanding status, because each individual born to the social reality of Nanwalek can and does acquire some kind of social status, immediately acquiring social capital-building “credit,” which is further shaped and elaborated upon by living in the community and going through the course of their lives. Previously I outlined peoples’ affectionate

approach to babies and small children, and some of the general local ideas that govern child rearing practices that places teenagers at the bottom of the social scale. Re-orienting these ideas in the context of the hierarchical social system it becomes clear that the decrease in social standing throughout childhood is a necessity for subsequent integration as an adult, a part of enculturation. It provides education in social roles, as well as prepares children for understanding the balance between the appropriateness of using their personal charisma and restraining their yearning for individuality in order to follow other people's advice. From becoming an adult to growing old and becoming an Elder everyone automatically accumulates a certain amount of social capital, which raises social standing and the kinds of positions one can acquire in the community. This, of course, also changes the different kinds of roles people fulfill during their lifetime, and they need to constantly modify their behavior accordingly. Elders are always treated with respect in public situations, regardless of their previous life histories, or the individual relationships they might have with the various members of the community. In a sense, they are also often "shared" amongst networks, exactly because due to their age, they are more likely to be closely connected to many of the high status actors in the existing social arena. Additionally, having perfect behavior in the past (although as an Elder they often do) and leading a flawless life is not a prerequisite for becoming an Elder, yet once the status is acquired and acknowledged village-wide, certain prerogatives, including that of deference, are also automatically extended to these individuals.

It is customary to give away the first catch of the year, and also for children to give their first catch away to adults and especially to Elders. One day I met Kathy, one of the Elders of the village, on the road walking down from her house. We stopped for a short chat and she happily told me that a teenage son of one of her nieces brought her a fish and they cleaned and cooked it together. She was not only happy for the first fish of the season, but also that a young adult did the right thing by giving his first catch away to an Elder, and that she got to share the experience of preparing and eating the fish with him.

On other occasions, as for example during dinners (or Elder tea) at the community hall, Elders always receive special attention. If there is no priest or deacon present, they say the opening prayers; nobody takes food before the Elders are served or fill their plates, and during dinners younger adults and teenagers pay attention to re-fill

their Elders' teacups, bring them more coffee, or the extra helping of their favorite dish or dessert. Personal feelings and relationships do not influence the way people behave around Elders; they always need to be taken care of, which needs to be carried out with willingness and an agreeable attitude.

Elders, similarly to other people with high social standing, also have the right to make requests, both direct and indirect, for things that need to be done for them, or according to their opinions. I have mentioned before that teenagers are often ordered to complete tasks, and while the channels of communication are usually governed by conflict avoidance, it is not uncommon to see adults completing tasks requested by Elders or other persons with a high social status.

It is also the prerogative of high status individuals to pay for certain services or goods they wish to obtain. In hunter-gatherer literature, generally describing societies with low levels of social inequality, commodity exchange is often viewed through Sahlins' (1972) proposition, that the kinship distance between individuals engaged in transaction determines the nature of the exchange. A close kinship relation and gift exchange residing in one end of the continuum, and strangers with no kinship ties exchanging commodities on the other. In this sense, within social networks, individuals aim to engage in exchange relationships with further and further removed kin (Ingold 1994: 955) in order to extend their potential social support base. Yet in Nanwalek, which is a ranked society, social networks are not created on purely genealogical principles; rather, social networks are strongly influenced by the notions of social hierarchy. Consequently, the nature of the exchange, whether as gift or commodity, is not determined by "kinship distance," but relative social status. For this reason, it is possible for people in high social status to purchase commodities from their close kin, in which transaction they do not only purchase the commodity itself, but also the right to avoid further obligations. Because Gregory's (1982: 19) observation, in which he states that "commodity exchange establishes a relationship between the objects exchanged, whereas gift exchange establishes a relationship between the subjects" is still valid, a commodity transaction between a high and a lower status individual with close genealogical connection can transpire.

It is important to remember that tasks are usually completed within networks on the basis of individuals helping one another out. For this reason having money and being

willing to pay for things does not necessarily get the job done; rather it needs to be a combination of personal status, connections, favors, and compensation. Therefore being able to pay for something is a privileged position, which is reserved for only those with high social standing. Although financial resources and wealth alone are not enough to acquire power, as it first has to be achieved by other means such as personal behavior, once it is acknowledged, it partially manifests through the ability of being able to pay for goods and services, without having to depend solely on favors. Naturally, this also makes crossing over to other social networks easier and, when carried out in accordance with the local etiquette, it can also have the effect of propelling one forward to an even more prestigious position.

For others, the way to get things done is somewhat different and generally requires more personal involvement. When my husband and I needed wood for our cabin, similarly to many other families in the village, my husband went along with a group of men and worked at the mill site helping to cut lumber for us, and for other peoples' projects as well. Cutting lumber is not a single-person job; therefore there is a shared understanding of the need for collaboration, which is more valuable than monetary compensation alone. In Bodenhorn's terms labor earns the workers 'shares' through their investment. Without helping each other out the job cannot be done, even if somebody is willing to pay for it, while many families would not be able to afford banyas and smokehouses if it could be obtained only by paying for them.

For all these reasons it is also important to be an active part of a social network, which makes it possible for individuals to gain additional social positions by capitalizing on their own personal charisma, as well as gaining access to participate in institutionalized charisma, or by exhibiting an "ideal" social behavior of their current social status (Foucault 1983: 220). Becoming a parent, getting married, being chosen to be godparents for a newborn child and wedding sponsors in church for a new couple, becoming grandparents, or becoming Elders in the community all carry a certain social status with them that people acknowledge and which also entails a required social behavior. All these life events automatically raise one's social standing in the community, with other words, help people achieve a new social standing with authority, yet they also need to be properly enacted in order to successfully claim them on a more permanent basis. In contrast, coming to hold a bureaucratic position, such as an elected member of

the council, or getting a job at the council building does not have the same effect; without holding any other non-bureaucratic social position in the community, it does not do anything for individual social advancement. The way all the different aspects of social hierarchy come together in every day life is suitably revealed by the following story of building a smokehouse for Father in the fishing season.

5.3.1. Status and Charisma

Father and Matushka seem to like everything about fishing. Like many of the other residents of the village, they dedicate a considerable amount of time during the summer months to catching fish, cleaning fish, and putting up fish for the winter. That is probably what they, and everybody else, like the most about fishing; it can yield a good amount of subsistence food for their family in the winter months, significantly cutting down high grocery bills, not to mention being tasty. Yet Father did not have a smokehouse and was using other peoples' when he wanted to put up fish, that is to say until that particular summer.

One of the smokehouses Father usually borrowed was Wally's and Nina's, which was getting crowded with their own, their children's and with our fish hanging in there, so when Father mentioned to Wally a few times that he was going to put up some fish, Wally made the decision of building a smokehouse for Father. There already was enough lumber at the mill site, which was brought down that day by the Caterpillar. Next, Wally rounded up a crew, mostly consisting of his sons and son-in-law to put the shell of the smokehouse together in his yard, which latter was dragged down to Father's house with the tractor. That was the moment when we became aware of the new project. As we heard the tractor crawling by our house, my husband looked out the window to see what was going on. Abandoning his own project and our fishing plans for that afternoon, he grabbed his hammer and informed me that he was going down to Father's to help finish the smokehouse. They worked into the night and finished it up the next morning with materials gathered from all around the village. The smokehouse was up and running by that night to Father's and Matushka's great delight, and for Wally's and his crew's satisfaction. A couple of days later I went down to take banya with Matushka, and she happily gave me the grand tour, with a good portion of the smokehouse already filled

with fish at various stages of drying, and with her ceaseless comments on how grateful and overjoyed they were on being able to put up fish for their own liking and timing. When I mentioned to Wally that I saw Father, Matushka and their kids working on fish virtually at every hour of the day, he chuckled and told me “Yep, Father sure likes his smokehouse!” It gave him great pleasure to see the happiness his work brought to someone else in the community, and that he, indirectly, made a contribution to the Church.

This event highlights several aspects of the social network system. It displays the way networks are organized and structured on the basis of social ranking, as well as the overarching influence of personal social standing and status on everyday interactions. First of all, it is important to realize that Father, based on his high ranking position as a priest by sharing the charisma of office through the Church, did not have to participate in the work, yet this fact did not create resentment in any of the participants.

Most of the workers were prompted to participate in the project by Wally’s request, which was supported by his personal charisma and achieved status. By making such a request he actively claimed his achieved status as it was his prerogative to call on others lower in the social hierarchy within his own social network, to fulfill their social obligations towards him. Wally’s social status as a leader was also understood in terms of charisma of office, as being a chief entailed the obligation of providing for the Church. The workers also realized that they were completing a project for Father, who also occupies a high social status, thus their contribution was in part an expression of deference. Completing a project for a priest is unconsciously (and sometimes consciously) equated with doing work for the Church, because people view the Church’s authority as institutional charisma. After all, helping out with a priest’s and his family’s everyday difficulties help him to focus more on his service for the Church and the congregation. It is also important to note that being a priest is an achieved and an ascribed status with the possibility of combining personal and institutional charisma. To become a priest one needs to complete years of studies, have unfailing commitment and successfully go through ordination. Yet being a good priest, who is well-liked in a community, depends on effectively claiming these statuses, by continually enactment of peoples’ expectations associated with the charisma of office and personal charisma, both of which induce deference.

Therefore, the idea of being a chief, a priest, or having any other kind of high social standing, thus enacted within the community by all members, based on congruent conceptualization of that position, and as such, charisma, in connection with power, authority, and social status becomes a symbolic capital, through the “perceived” and “endowed” attribution of specific value(s) (Bourdieu 1994: 8). Fully appropriating a position means not a simple attainment, or achievement, but the act of conjunctionally taking possession of that position by heeding the correlating social rules. Claiming a position is always temporal in nature, because it needs to be constantly maintained. In a ranked society charisma, as a dimension of power, is a dominating factor in social success, due to its connection to social hierarchy, which needs to be combined with the knowledge and enactment of local etiquette and the active participation in social networks.

For this reason everyone in the community needs to be aware of their own personal standing, the situations of others around them, as well as the sociocultural connotations connected to particular status that can be achieved and consequently claimed. Some of them are limited (such as chief, priest, reader, council members etc) while others are not, and these latter high ranking social roles are based on charisma and the enactment of proper behavior. Accordingly, the best way to achieve a new status is not to aspire to a higher one, but to perform the current one appropriately. Naturally, age places certain limitations on the kinds of positions one can acquire at a particular time, yet as a young person, who mostly complies with the social system, one can go far in future endeavors. The active participation in networks does not require a mindless compliance, rather a strategic one that is combined with recognizing genuine need and willingness to help if possible. In this sense social advancement within a network and the situations of the networks in relation to one another are all based on a social hierarchy, which is balanced on the ongoing exchange of favors and service (or credit and capital). In this social milieu charisma is a major organizing factor, and people are culturally conditioned to recognize and follow social players in possession of such characteristics in personal, as well as in institutionalized forms.

In the previous sections I demonstrated the importance of charisma in the social life of Nanwalek, and its interconnectedness with social ranking and networks. I also provided examples in regard to the significance of charisma in achieving and claiming

leadership positions by acting in accordance with social expectations associated with specific social roles. On the pages to follow, I am focusing on the connections between Sugpiaq social ranking and the hierarchy of the Orthodox Church, by using the idea of conceptual analogy to delineate current cultural and religious experience in the life of the Sugpiat of Nanwalek.

5.4. The System of Sugpiaq Russian Orthodoxy

Considering notions of power and shifting power relations in cross-cultural religious discourse (Bowen 2002, Burch 1994, Kan 1999, Kirsch 2004, Murray 1999, Shaw and Stewart 1994, Trott 1997) is indispensable in understanding local Native experience, therefore I propose to further explore the correspondence (Mousalimas 2003) between Russian Orthodox concepts of authority and traditional Sugpiaq understandings.

As previously outlined, in the case of the Sugpiaq, authority played a major role in internalizing Russian Orthodoxy and people in social leadership positions assumed important religious positions in the stratified structure of the Church as well. This phenomenon, in general, is not unique to Nanwalek, to the Sugpiaq Alutiiq, or even to the Native peoples of Alaska and Siberia (Balzer 1999: 72, Kan 1996, 1999, Oswalt 1963, Znamenski 2003: 15). Oswalt's (1963) detailed description of the Napaskiak Yupiit also highlights the importance of acknowledging social leadership in the Russian Orthodox Church, as well as the ability of persons of religious authority extending this leadership role into the course of everyday life. The hierarchical structure of the Orthodox Church seemed to be a major draw for the Tlingit as well, according to Kan (1999: 420), because it provided opportunities to reinforce "fundamental values and principles of the pre-Christian sociocultural order [such] as the correlation between the social and the spatial hierarchies." Kan also remarks on the practice of Tlingit men having a preference for participation in church service, church related activities, and in Orthodoxy in general, on festive occasions, which provided excellent opportunities for them to express, and capitalize on the notion of social status (Kan 1996: 626).

In Nanwalek, even today, the Church and Church affairs are managed and maintained through the traditional concepts of authority and power embedded in the social network system. It is possible to approach Orthodoxy through the traditional

Sugpiaq understanding of power due to the integration that took place based on the analogy, which people conceptualized on the basis of hierarchy. On one hand, this hierarchy was, in part, based on the public recognition of charisma as a desirable leadership characteristic, and as such, an element of social capital in Nanwalek. On the other hand, hierarchy, as social stratification within the Orthodox Church, supported by, and in part created based on, theological principles was also recognized to carry charisma. Therefore recognizing the Church's charisma (applied to individuals not in the theological, but in the social sense) as analogous to the Sugpiaq understanding of an unnamed, but community recognized, notion that exudes power and authority, which commands deference from other social actors, and impels social advancement, by conceptualization within the local mode of thought and cultural framework, resulted in the internalization of Russian Orthodoxy, and its consequent reinterpretation not only as a religious, but also as a Sugpiaq cultural marker of identity.

Cohen (1985: 50) remarks that "ritual confirms and strengthens social identity" because "it is an important means through which people experience community." In this sense the internalization of Russian Orthodoxy into the everyday life of the Sugpiaq community of Nanwalek based on the conceptual analogy between the social hierarchy of the Church and that of the Sugpiaq social system, allowed people to open new venues of negotiation towards Orthodoxy. According to Mousalimas the "dynamics of divine participation comprised a vital point of comprehension where the ancestral far northern culture(s) could emerge and retain the new faith and practices – to comprehend not merely in a theoretical manner, but in a profoundly existential way" (Mousalimas 2003: 220). The Sugpiaq people of Nanwalek created a conceptual analogy in regards to hierarchical structures, followed by recognizing points of comprehension in between Sugpiaq and Orthodox spiritual ideas, which made it possible for them to incorporate their local beliefs into Orthodox Christianity, and in an ongoing, diachronic process formulate Sugpiaq Russian Orthodoxy, as their own, Native religion.

The integration of Orthodoxy with the Sugpiaq intellectual framework is so extensive, thorough, and all-encompassing, that today it is impossible to neatly separate, label, or compartmentalize the Sugpiaq elements and the Orthodox ones. People in Nanwalek regard all of it as their very own; their legitimate, authentic, Sugpiaq tradition,

which they consciously and unconsciously engage with on a daily basis. Orthodoxy is present in all social situations, from public praying and identifying social relations to organizing celebrations and engaging in exchange.

In addition to the previous examples highlighting the intimate connection between Sugpiaq people and their Orthodox religion, in the rest of the chapter, I focus on one particular event, which demonstrates conceptual analogy at work. By looking at the act of Church renovation, it is possible to recognize and identify the key elements of conceptual analogy in Nanwalek.

The major reason for building the currently used church in Nanwalek was due to the rapid population growth of the village in the past decades. The number of people nearly quadrupled since the 1950's, and this trend has been continuous ever since. Building, structural maintenance, beautification and cleaning have all traditionally, as well as currently, been provided by locals, and involvement in such activities follow a certain pattern that is an excellent expression of Sugpiaq social mode of thought.

Easter, and preparation for Pascha, is the most important (religious) time of the year for Orthodox Christians, including those in Nanwalek. It is customary to make improvements to the Church building and purchase or replace devotional and service items such as candelabras, flower vases, material for the stands and the altar, candles, vestments etc. While there, during the period of Great Lent, a number of new purchases were scheduled, in addition to the annual cleaning and decoration for the feast. Due to an incident, however, that particular year's preparation went beyond the customary, with the complete replacement of the flooring, the sewing of a new tablecloth set, and the purchase of a brand new set of candleholders and memorial stand (which holds candles burned in memory of those who had passed on).

The episode that ignited the series of events happened during one of the vigil services. While using the incense to venerate the various icons of the iconostas (also called icon wall and iconostasis), Father almost tripped on the decaying carpet in front of the sanctuary. In general, the poor condition of the floor could have resulted in a variety of disasters, such as dropping of sacred objects or even the sacrament, dropping the incense holder and starting a fire, or bodily injury to himself or to one of the boys serving

at the altar. Although Father had not said anything, by that night the accident was a well known fact throughout the village and even those who were not present at vespers expressed genuine concern. The news promptly spread through phone calls and personal visits, through virtual and actual channels of communication, almost immediately reaching the various people in high social status and authority, such as the men acting as *starosti* for the church (who were also council members and chiefs), the sub deacon, and the readers. After some discussion accompanied by a series of phone calls, they all had agreed to make arrangements to replace the old carpeting with laminate flooring, and that it was to be done instantly.

As previously outlined, problems are addressed on the basis of momentary needs, and solutions are provided either immediately or not at all. Since the needs of the Church are always treated as a priority compared to individual needs, significant initiatives are followed by almost everyone from all the different social networks of the community, regardless of personal feelings or standings. This sentiment is summarized with the commonly used phrase: “it’s [done] for the *Church*”. In this sense, the acknowledgment of the Church’s power and authority is both religiously and socially based. On the one hand, people are devoted Orthodox Christians, thus they believe in the Church’s power, and they do not question it. On the other hand, in a social sense, they also acknowledge the Church’s power deriving from the charisma of office interpreted not in the theological, but in the social sense, which is larger than individual people, or individual networks alone. All social networks, containing all social actors come together in acknowledging the power of the Church through recognizing and deferring to its authority that is based on the charisma of office.

In this particular case the initiative started out with people who had a great deal of power, authority and, in general, high social standing in the community; therefore, it was not difficult to bring their plans into action by the beginning of the following day. Young adults supervised by an older person were “let to” visit the houses of the community asking for donations to purchase the flooring. Since the result of the first round was not sufficient, the *starosti* sent the people making collections around for a second time. When the second round reached me, I happened to be at a friends’ house visiting in the company of a larger group of people. I made a sufficient donation during

the first collection, yet I asked the people collecting not to write my name and the amount on the list of donors, exhibiting yet another faux pas. For that reason, I did not respond to the request the second time around, which was met with one of the adults accompanying the 'collection committee' making an elusive comment about "some people who have not given anything yet," while giving me significant sideways glances. At the same time the other person, who had collected my contribution the day before, quietly explained that I had already contributed, to which the pair of them contentedly took off to the next house.

Initially, I did not realize that it was important to have my name and the amount I donated registered, because I did not understand that it was my social obligation to contribute my "share" to the project, and not a question of simply "sharing". Although 'sharing' is voluntary, people usually feel obligated to share in order to avoid negative social sanctions. If one tries to avoid providing for the Church, without having a valid reason for not contributing, it is interpreted as a defiance of authority, and a disregard for the socially sanctioned deference. For this reason, when monetary or material contributions are required to complete a project, the resources are gathered on a semi-organized basis, meaning that either donations are made as an individual decision, an offering, or they are collected by children, young adults and adults, who are supervised, but often not accompanied, by a person of high status. In a sense these donations are regulated by social control, because they are given in a public setting (Douglas 1990: xiv). Yet they are also voluntary, because the opportunity to give is created in a way to maximize avoiding direct confrontations. People know it is their social obligation to give, to contribute their share, but they also know the public expectation on the amount of their contribution is based on their particular economic circumstances. If the project involves labor, individuals either spontaneously volunteer, or are 'led to volunteer' for action and participation. A common form of such leading transpires by innuendo, in the form of mentioning the problem in someone's presence, but not asking directly for help, which was the case in my own situation as well. Again, it is highly impolite not to respond to someone who had just expressed a genuine need of any kind. Sometimes material needs (building supplies, food, sponsoring certain devotional items) may be acquired through the same method; and becoming a donor or sponsor for the Church is an extremely prestigious position in the community. This prestige originates from the act of actively

contributing to the Church, which allows people to participate in something that is larger than themselves; and by their support they share the Church's institutionalized charisma. This charisma is acknowledged in the community, specifically through the act of donation, as something culturally appropriate, good, and proper. The donor had performed a commendable deed, prompting positive reinforcement from the community, and temporarily raising the donor's social standing in the hierarchical social system. This elevation in social status can be perceived in people's reaction, perhaps in the increase of deference shown, or positive changes in the relationships within social networks. It is also important to recognize that these are only temporary elevations in social status, and in order to keep them constant, people have to keep behaving a culturally and socially appropriate manner.

In a ranked society it is important to have constant and reliable information on people's particular social and economical circumstance. Accordingly, monetary donations and contributions are never requested from people who cannot afford them; in fact since the overseers perfectly know everyone's particular condition and situation, they are also aware of to whom exactly they should turn for contributions, and how much their contributions should be. Therefore, people who were donating under their means, and their obligations deriving from their social status, for the flooring project were visited several times, until the main coordinators deemed their contributions sufficient. At the same time, it was decided that additional purchases were necessary: wood for trimming the floor and the doors, and some copper guards for the step leading up to the sanctuary. These items were purchased by individuals who were 'induced' to help out. Similarly to the process of monetary donations, some of the people in the community who were known to have extra resources on hand at that particular time were advised, in the form of strong suggestions, to buy the various materials needed for the Church according to their means. Although these individuals probably had no planned to donate these sums of money to the Church, when confronted with a request embedded in the local cultural context, they did not hesitate in giving up their resources and making the needs of the Church a priority. They also, very characteristically, promptly responded to an immediate need, according to the local cultural norms, and by the end of the day, most of them took

pride in their donations and actually considered it to be their own idea and individual decision.

The request for donation was presented by individuals of high social status, who achieved their position, in part, by displaying charisma, and who were also holding important positions in the Church, which also lent them the charisma of office by association. In a sense, it was the organizer's obligation to take on the project; otherwise they would have failed in fulfilling the cultural expectations associated with their social status. Because today social status is constructed on the basis of religious and secular hierarchy, social expectations influence the social aspect of both the profane and the sacred.

Seeing the active participation of those in high status, the next day, even more people became inspired by this outburst of activity, and several of them offered their sponsorship for the new candleholders, as well as their labor for the upcoming spring-cleaning. When the flooring was delivered to the village via small aircraft, a large group of men voluntarily reported for work in the Church, while others started to stain the trim and prepare the remaining items for installation. Meanwhile, an order of sewing material arrived, and a couple of the women transformed them into a new Lenten tablecloth set, while others cooked and delivered food for the workers in the Church. All together the renovation project was a great success, and the community celebrated Pascha in a renewed and truly beautified Church.

Easter (Pascha), the resurrection of Christ, as noted, is the most important holiday of the Orthodox Church, and people in Nanwalek observe this feast with great reverence, and appreciation. They come together in the preparation, pooling their resources, attending the seemingly constant Church services, and outfitting the Church and their own houses for this annual event.

Charisma, personal and institutional, as an organizing principle in the power relations of social networks, is perhaps the most prominent in the community during this time of the year. People abandon personal tasks to complete work for the church or to attend services and even the 'occasional church-goers', as I described in chapter three, participate (including having confession and if their circumstances allow it, communion).

The preparation and the execution of the rituals, traditions, and customs are all carried out in a social context, complete with the observance and enactment of social hierarchy. Yet, Easter is a deeply spiritual event, a mystical transformation, where God, by the death and resurrection of His Son, grants the possibility of eternal life. It is a shared experience, which cannot escape all who go through Great Lent and the celebration of Easter together. I have never experienced such a complete understanding of *communitas* as when I was standing in the dark church with the rest of the community at the beginning of Easter service. We were waiting for Father and the rest of the church leaders to assemble the procession, this time not holding the *plastenica* (the shroud), but rather candles to symbolize Christ's resurrection. After complete darkness, Father's candle, the only light in the Church, illuminated the faces of the people we only sensed before. The light was slowly passed down, candle by candle, person to person. The doors of the Church opened, the bell started to ring, and we all joined the procession led by Father and the men honored with carrying icons and devotional items. After the third round of circling the church building along the outside walls with lit candles in hand, we gathered around the stairs to listen to the Easter Evangelium, and to sing the Easter *troparion* (hymn) for the first time; in English, in Russian, and in Sugtestun. Despite my attention being divided between my video camera and the service, I could feel the joy and reverence emanating from the people around me. It was an end of darkness, and light was to come. The time of sadness was over, and we were all overjoyed.

The feeling of happiness only grew during the several-hours-long Easter service. Around four o'clock in the morning, when the service and the blessing of the foods were over, laughter filled the Church as we all exchanged eggs, sampled festal foods, and greeted one another with the traditional Easter greeting: *Kristusaaq Unguirtuq! Piciinek Unguirtuq!*

We all shared a feeling of transition, *communitas*, and transformation. We all followed the lead of "religious experts," most of whom were social leaders as well. We followed Elders during the preparation for Easter in getting ready for the feast according to specific cultural ideas, including locally interpreted religious notions of Orthodoxy. We responded to the request of the Orthodox Sisterhood to participate in the cleaning and decoration of the Church, and the starostas' request to contribute donations and labor to

the renovation project. During the religious service we followed Father's lead in participating in the rituals, as well as the sub-deacons', the readers' and the singers' instructions.

These leadership positions can be viewed through the notion of charisma, the leaders' rationally unexplainable exceptional quality, which they held by either their own virtue, by association to an office invested with charisma, or in some cases, by combining their own personal charisma with that of the Church's institutional one. Regardless of the nature of the leaders' charisma, they were all figures of authority, commending deference within their social networks, which placed them into leadership roles in the system of hierarchy, ultimately creating the power within.

The interconnectedness of charisma, social status and social networks is a part of everyday social reality for people in Nanwalek. It is conceptualized, perceived and acted out with the conscious and unconscious understandings of its temporal equilibrium (Gluckman 1968), which, by its perpetual flux, propels certain actors forward and pulls other ones back. Its continuous temporality is an attribute that is difficult to disassociate from the ongoing process of building and spending social credit in creating social status and capital. Yet it also makes people receptive to the importance of social status, the need to have a place in a social network, and to recognize the power and the ways it can be transformed to authority in the community.

The first Sugpiaq people who encountered Russian Orthodoxy lived in a ranked social system, and as such, were particularly attuned to the notion of authority. For this reason, it was natural for them to recognize the hierarchical social structure of the Orthodox Church analogous to their own social life. Because they perceived Russian Orthodoxy through their own culturally specific conceptual framework, the origins of charisma, as personal or as institutionalized, did not hold any significance for them, as long as it provided socially acknowledgeable authority and power. For Sugpiaq people being Orthodox did not interfere with their own intellectual framework; in fact, their internalization of Russian Orthodoxy as a Sugpiaq cultural concept was made simple by the conceptual analogy they perceived in the hierarchical structure of the Church and that of their own.

The conceptual analogy of Sugpiaq Russian Orthodoxy is still intact today in Nanwalek. The social life of the village is still organized by social ranking, where both

ascribed and achieved characteristics interact in forming individual social status within a system of social networks. These social networks, however, are not limited to only the secular spheres of society, but include religious conceptualizations as well, which are integrated through the local notions of hierarchy and authority. This integration process, the politics involved in religious syncretism, has allowed Sugpiaq people to experience Russian Orthodoxy on a social and religious basis, and most importantly, as their own, authentic, Sugpiaq religion.

6. Conclusion

“Although its demise has been long predicted by social scientists, religion today—far from being driven out by the combined forces of industrialization, materialistic values, sociotechnological specialization, and science, in short, the forces of secularization—shows remarkable vitality. This fact is an embarrassment to modern social theory” (Reeves 1998).

In this dissertation I set out to find an explanation to a specific question: Why are the Sugpiaq people of Nanwalek still exclusively Russian Orthodox today? Interestingly, the answer is exactly what people in Nanwalek would reply to this question: “Because that’s who we are! We are Russian Orthodox.” For them the question is irrelevant; they are not interested in rationalizing the explanation behind their Orthodox faith, rather they are concerned about its enactment, to make sure that they, not just personally, but also as a community, remain Russian Orthodox. They are just as much Orthodox Christians as they are Sugpiaq, and to be precise, they are Sugpiaq Russian Orthodox people. Removing one aspect of their identity is impossible without negating the other one as well, because their “Sugpiaqness” does not compete with their Orthodox faith, rather it is one and the same. To be a Sugpiaq of Nanwalek is to be Russian Orthodox, it is a “package deal,” which is for them completely natural.

This, of course, does not mean that they are not aware of competing religions within their cultural area. On the contrary, people in Nanwalek thoroughly understand the interconnections of their Orthodox faith with their Sugpiaq heritage, and for this reason, they consciously choose to maintain their inborn quality as Orthodox over any other religious affiliation. For this reason their Russian Orthodoxy is active. They actively decide to maintain it by participation and by passing it on to their children, grandchildren and godchildren day after day, not only as their religion, but also as their Sugpiaq tradition. Their idea of Orthodoxy is based on the teachings of the Church, as well as their local interpretations, similarly to all Orthodox communities in the world. Yet, for people in Nanwalek it is important to perform these traditions in a specific way,

according to their understandings which they partly learned from their ancestors and partly formulate through their own lifetimes.

During conversations and interviews in Nanwalek people never seemed to be interested in claiming to know “the Truth”. What they wanted to tell me was their own understanding by sharing their own interpretation. Finding circumscribed, exact definitions is not important from their point of view, because they know such definitions are nonexistent, therefore, meaningless. What is important however is to understand things, to find a meaning, to make sense of the world where everything is always changing.

Similarly, in this dissertation, I present my own interpretation of the intimate connection between Sugpiaq people and their Orthodox faith. In my analysis I relied on my personal experiences of living in Nanwalek and being part of the community. I also drew on everyday conversations with various people living in the village, through which I found inspiration for my research in their actions, reactions and interactions. When the time came to analyze my ethnographic material I chose the framework of religious syncretism, as the “politics of religious synthesis” (Shaw and Stewart 1994: 7), because it provided flexible theoretical considerations for making sense of the seemingly amorphous, yet all encompassing, phenomena I came to appreciate during my fieldwork. However, I soon realized that the current understanding of religious syncretism, while being informative in regards to understanding the general concepts of religious synthesis, does not provide a “tool” for understanding the specificities of the connection between human actors and their religions. I was interested in the micro processes of the politics of religious synthesis in addition to the larger, general ones. For this reason, to understand the specific situation of the Sugpiaq of Nanwalek, I came to develop a new approach to understanding the process of religious syncretism. I decided to explore the synthesizing process through delineating analogies, which are created on the basis of local conceptualizations of foreign religious ideas and practice.

In the previous chapters, in addition to providing a historical overview, I described the ways people rely on social networks in Nanwalek to organize their everyday lives. It would be impossible to live in the village without being part of these networks, which entwine all levels of human existence (social, cultural, religious, economic etc.). Because of their pervasiveness, they combine and channel personal

interactions and mediate local ideas on personal connections. Social networks, as the dominant organizing factor in the life of Nanwalek, are concentric and hierarchical in nature. The hierarchies within and amongst networks are generated by the local interpretations of charisma as a desirable attribute of leadership engendering power and authority. In the previous chapter I demonstrated the significance of charisma in traditional and contemporary Sugpiaq understanding of social ranking, and its correlations to Russian Orthodoxy. By examining the connections between the traditional social organization of Nanwalek and the local cosmological ideas including Russian Orthodoxy, I suggested that, in addition to the religious correspondences between traditional Sugpiaq ideas of the numinous and that of Russian Orthodoxy, the community of Nanwalek continually maintains its faith and religious exclusivity through the application of conceptual analogies, which are created based on locally viewed and interpreted similarities with the social hierarchy of Russian Orthodoxy.

In my introduction I pointed out the various correspondences generally cited when discussing the relationship between Sugpiaq people and their Russian Orthodox faith (Black 1981, 1992, 2004, Dauenhauer 1997, Kan 1983, 1996, 1999, Mousalimas 1995, 2003, Oleksa 1987, 1993, Znamenski 1996, 1999, 2003). These correspondences are usually recognized as concrete connections between specific cultural and religious elements, such as the significance of names and naming, rituals, religious paraphernalia, or the remembrance of the dead. The importance of these factors in conversion to Orthodoxy is irrefutable, and can be recognized even in today's religious practice. Yet, the introduction of new religious concepts does not automatically engender religious conversion or long-lasting effects. On the contrary, many indigenous groups declined missionizing attempts precisely because the prospects of the new religion had nothing constructive to offer from their point of view, or in other words, people did not conceptualize any aspect of the new religion as an analogy corresponding to ideas in their own ontological reality.¹⁰³

In the study of conversion various ethnographic case studies exemplify the vast variety of social and cultural phenomena that can surface due to a conversion experience

¹⁰³ As for example Russian Orthodox attempts in some indigenous groups in Siberia were quite futile, and rarely went beyond a nominal conversion (Znamenski 1999).

or to the emergence of a multi denominational social milieu (Barker 1993, Black 1994, Bowen 2002, Burch 1994, Comaroff and Comaroff 1991, Fienup-Riordan 1988, Greenfield 2001, Hefner 1993b, Jolles 2002, Kan 1990, Smith Kipp 1995, Laugrand 1997, Morrison 1990, Trott 1997, Znamenski 1999). By emphasizing the idiosyncrasies of these case studies, one can develop an understanding of the “native agency” in the operation of the conversion process, which facilitates the recognition of indigenous peoples as active participants and not as victims without any power and/or incentive to reject and preclude this phenomenon.¹⁰⁴ I regard conversion as a choice, largely because it does not happen without the active involvement of both parties involved, and the process is better understood as a continuous “conversation” (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991: 228). In this approach conversion does not refer to a definite singular event, rather to a process engaging different groups of people in an ideological exchange of religious ideas and practice. For this reason it is important to remember that religious affiliation is just as much a result of personal choices as historical events, that is to say macro- and micro- social processes, and while the personal aspect is often conscious and thought out, the larger social implications are frequently unforeseen. The dynamics in the conversion of an individual and in that of a group can be, and often are, very dissimilar; yet both conversion experiences are historically and socially grounded religious transformations, which cannot be understood without comprehensive social and cultural contextualization.

Considering conversion as a strategic choice does not negate its connections to religious experience, but rather supports it. People describing a personal religious experience as the dominant factor in their conversion, at one point, had to make the conscious choice between pursuing or rejecting their “epiphany”. Similarly, it is important to recognize that Native people did have a choice in selecting and transferring affiliation to a particular religion, including that denomination’s social-cultural agenda. True, there were often negative social factors that prompted, or in certain cases forced, people to “go along” with foreign ideas, yet the significance of human agency in the process of religious conversion as well as in religious syncretism which provides “tools” for adaptation and to cope with changing socio-cultural circumstances is undeniable

¹⁰⁴ While I am not denying the close connection between colonialism and Christianization especially in Western Christianity, I also would like to take precautions against a one-sided portrayal of complex events, and rather would prefer to approach such instances with the presumption of active local participation in conversion.

(Barker 1993, Black 1994, Burch 1994, Comaroff and Comaroff 1991, Greenfield 2001, Jolles 2002, Kan 1990, Smith Kipp 1995, Morrison 1990, Znamenski 1999).

One of the major factors regularly highlighted in the process of conversion, is the idea that it did not happen in numbers until a prominent individual of the group decided to get involved with the new religion. After the conversion of a leadership figure, a large number of the population followed along, ultimately resulting in the alteration of both indigenous and alien religious ideas and practice.¹⁰⁵ In this sense, the original religious dogmas and rituals were highly affected in the indigenization of the religion, and due to the active, large involvement of locals, the privilege of interpretation, meaning-making, and construing the new religious ideas were not an exclusive domain of the missionizers any more, rather of those in the community in possession of authority. In the process of continuous negotiation of religious ideas and practice, locals made an attempt to understand, to embrace, to adopt, and to successfully implement the appealing elements of the new religion within their own ontological reality and cultural context. The internalization of any religion into a new cultural system will have a long lasting effect in a community only if the process of religious adaptation is conducted through the local intellectual framework, which combines both social and religious conceptualizations. Otherwise religious ideas fail to connect and gain meaning in the specifically local cultural milieu, and as such, people cannot mediate them through their own mode of thought, which ultimately renders foreign religious ideas meaningless.

The outcome of the conversion process is quite diverse; in some cases people did succeed in establishing analogies with the new religion, while in other situations they did not find anything appealing in what the new religiosity had to offer (Pollock 1993: 191) consequently they chose to ignore or reject it. Studies conducted in various Native Alaskan communities have demonstrated the close correlation between practicing Russian Orthodoxy and cultural preservation through the reinterpretation of ethnic

¹⁰⁵ Kan writes: "The conversion of several of Sitka's most high-ranking leaders and clan heads dramatically improved the Russian Church's image in the eyes of the Tlingit community" (Kan 1999: 248). Also, Jolles describes a similar situation on St Lawrence Island, where it became clear that the Christian mission would not be successful unless Elders, traditionally considered to have access to spirit power, would make the change (Jolles 2002: 267). In addition, among the Tswana, junior members of the royal family, who were by their rank outside of the realms of actual power, established connections with the Methodist missionaries and became leaders of the Christian communities (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991: 240).

identities and the reinforcement of cultural traditions (Black 2001: 7, Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer 1994: 80, Fienup-Riordan 1990: 97, Kan 1996: 626, Mousalimas 1990: 320, 2003: 220 Znamenski 2003: 46). The success of Russian Orthodox missionary work among Arctic indigenous peoples varied greatly, yet everywhere where Orthodoxy became a central element of social life it also took on local characteristics and became a central local institution in preserving and transmitting traditional culture.

When discussing religious syncretism it is important to remember that it is not a mere product of the mixing process and it is not the mixing process itself either. Rather it is an ongoing process of internalization in specific cultural contexts, where the creation of meaning is achieved by people's conceptualization of analogies between their own ontological reality and that of the new religion. For this reason I regard conceptual analogies as a set of correlations based on perceived similarities between the social aspects of a local intellectual framework and that of a foreign religious one, resulting in the internalization of foreign religious ideas into the local cultural environment. In the case of the Sugpiaq people of the Lower Kenai Peninsula, the notion of charisma and the way it operates in Sugpiaq society, particularly in social ranking and creating social networks that are the foundation of Sugpiaq social reality, is the analogy through which people conceptualized Russian Orthodoxy. Yet the process of syncretism did not stop there, as it is an inherent characteristic of all religions, therefore it is ongoing, accommodating people's changing notions of their social cultural reality over time. Therefore it is essential to separate religious syncretism from the habitual colonial association, which provides opportunities for exploring only the past, the "product" of syncretism, and not the much more promising culturally embedded ongoing process.

Syncretism, unlike creolization (Hannerz 1987), hybridization (Park 1950) or bricolage (Lévi-Strauss 1966), is exclusive to religious application¹⁰⁶, or phrased in another way, it has religious aspects in addition to cultural ones. Syncretism is embedded in all religious traditions, yet it interacts with other cultural elements that, according to Euro-American ideology, are not intrinsically religious. As I previously pointed out, what

¹⁰⁶ Shaw and Stewart suggest that the uncertainty regarding syncretism might be caused by the still existing resonance with the concepts of "pure" and "authentic," opposed to "mixed," "impure" and "inauthentic" (Shaw and Stewart 1994: 7).

is considered religious and what is regarded as cultural, are locally interpreted (and not necessarily in a dichotomy), and for this reason the meaning-making which takes place in the process of religious syncretism through the creation of conceptual analogies always has some kind of religious and cultural constituents. For people in Nanwalek, leadership and charisma are cultural concepts that are played out through the same understandings in religious context as in the social one. As I demonstrated through the System of Sugpiaq Russian Orthodoxy, people's ideas of authority are not separated into religious and social sources of power; rather they are synthesized into one analogous understanding.

Consequently, it is logical to assume that there is a pattern in the synthesizing process, an intuitive ontology (Boyer 1994), an inherent nature of the human mind, by which people classify the world around them. While the concept of intuitive ontology is useful in delineating the mechanism of meaning-making in religious syncretism, it is only one aspect of the process. Due to its automatic, meaning-generating nature, the concept negates the existence of human agency, the people who make choices in regards to the incorporation or rejection of new ideas into their everyday lives. The assumed automatic characteristic does not provide opportunities for appreciation of the complex phenomenon of religious syncretism, where people make strategic selections regarding their specific social-cultural situations. Therefore it does not allow room for explaining the continuity of the synthesizing process, because it is removed from the cultural context. To explain people's devotion to Russian Orthodoxy in Nanwalek today, it is not sufficient to look at the mechanism of religious synthesis in isolation. Rather, it needs to be placed on an ongoing continuum, because people maintained their Orthodox religion by active choices throughout the past 200 years. At one point, Sugpiaq people internalized Orthodoxy based on perceived correspondences and analogies; yet they constantly reframe their understandings, and re-conceptualize these connections, due to changes in their social-cultural environment, which keeps their devotion and their faith alive.

Conceptual analogies are flexible connections, capable of accommodating diachronic cultural change, yet they are not unbreakable. At a particular juncture people might reassess their priorities, which leads them to cease their association with a particular religious tradition, breaking the previous analogy. They can also turn towards a new religious tradition, which they perceive to be more fitting of their particular

circumstances. The new religious ideas and practice are approached on a conceptual level, where finding analogies allow people to establish a connection with the new religious tradition, and to assume a new religious identity, or perhaps to create a new analogy with their old religion.

Today Nanwalek is still a single-denominational Russian Orthodox village, where people consciously preclude any other religion to enter the community. They have chosen to maintain their Orthodox faith, as it is part of their religious, as well as their cultural identity as Sugpiaq. Nevertheless, not all Sugpiaq Alutiiq villages are exclusively Russian Orthodox. There are a number of multi-denominational communities, although almost all Sugpiaq Alutiiq villages have a Russian Orthodox section. Conversion from Orthodoxy to new religions, which are usually some form of Protestantism or a non-denominational church, mostly transpired in the past fifty or so years, and the reaction to the existence of a non-Orthodox population segment within the cultural group is still somewhat divisive.

I have heard Orthodox Sugpiat describe their experiences as “being shocked” when they first encountered non-Orthodox relatives or distant relations. Oftentimes, the most profound realizations regarding religious diversity within the cultural group transpires at times of mourning and funerals. Understandably, such occasions are emotionally charged and affect not only the closest family members, but also a wider circle of relatives, who are actively involved on social-emotional levels during the ceremony, and in the procedures surrounding the event. Moreover, in the sorrow of the relatives, and in the mourning of the community, an expression of personal loss is combined with culturally inscribed ideas on the correct way of expressing grief (Rosaldo 1988), which are very different in Eastern Christian, including Orthodox, and in Western Christian contexts. Hence, for many Sugpiaq Alutiiq, this moment is crucial for discovering, either consciously or unconsciously, the discrepancy between social and cultural boundaries, as also the contrast between religious and ethnic affiliations.

For people in Nanwalek the surprise derives from the fact that, according to their understanding, being Orthodox is a quality they are born with, a part of their Sugpiaq self, an organic aspect of their conceptualization of “Sugpiaqness”. For others in the Sugpiaq Alutiiq cultural group, however, Orthodoxy was only one aspect of their identity that could be altered in order to accommodate other religious elements introduced during

the American social-cultural system, which favored religious pluralism and Western Christianity. Some of the people in the Sugpiaq Alutiiq cultural area decided, for various reasons, to take on a new, non-Orthodox religious identity and affiliation. For these people, in addition to being an actual religious experience, the new religious identity also became a connection to a new reference group (Austin-Broos 2003: 9),¹⁰⁷ which placed previously unattainable opportunities within their reach.

Converting from Orthodoxy to another religion was just as much a choice as converting to Orthodoxy. Because “changing religious identit[ies are]always an element of more embracing historical transformation,” conversion has different meanings for different people in different cultural and historical settings (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991: 250), which is true for the Sugpiaq Alutiiq identity formation as well. Various people in different villages had decided to cease their association with their Orthodox religion and the Orthodox Church, and in many cases this also meant severing ties with a large part of their social lives as well. Their decisions could have been purely religiously or personally based, prompted by negative or positive social pressure, caused by economic reasons, or chosen to secure some kind of perceived gain; in any case, it was a conscious choice that had personal and social consequences.

Cynthia Enloe (1996) suggests that single denominational religious unity reinforces group identity, although it is not a requirement for developing the feeling and idea of a group identity. Following this train of thought, if the religious unity is removed from a group and the strengthening effect ceases to exist, the feeling of common belonging weakens within the group. Consequently, while religious unity is not required in order to have a group identity, where it does exist, it becomes intertwined with other reference groups of identity formations, and the removal of the religious identity can actually cause a rupture in the group identity as well. The outcomes of such an event can vary from the complete loss of group identity and the disbanding of the group, to the re-interpretation of group identity through a series of cultural venues that are strictly secular in nature. In these cases it is essential that all cultural aspects are reframed to carry only

¹⁰⁷ According to reference group theory “individuals develop [...] an anchor for their sense of self and other and for the entitlements and obligations thought to characterize relationships [...] when evaluating people, situations and life project” (Hefner 1993a: 25).

secular meanings to alleviate religiously based disagreements, which can further weaken group identity.

Villages with multi-denominational orientation have more difficulties in maintaining pre-contact cultural elements than ones with a single religious affiliation. Moreover, since Orthodoxy is comprehensively integrated with dominant Sugpiaq Alutiiq social ideas, and many social obligations and customs are performed in the context of social networks by synthesizing secular and religious elements, villages with a sizeable non-Orthodox religious population segment are more prone to loss of cultural traditions generally considered as a part of “being Sugpiaq” in the larger Sugpiaq Alutiiq cultural area. Consequently, in the process of creating new analogies, they also struggle with separating their Orthodox heritage from their Sugpiaq Alutiiq one. This, of course, does not mean that people automatically give up their Sugpiaq identity by becoming a member of a Western Christian church. Rather it means that in creating the new analogy people re-conceptualize their ancestors’, as well as their own, past in order to negotiate the requirements of their new religious identities with their old social-cultural selves.

Having such experiences is not unique to the Sugpiat Alutiit, rather, it is a phenomenon grounded and discussed within the context of religious conversion and syncretism (Assimeng 1978, Burch 1994, Comaroff and Comaroff 1991, Dea 2005). As I previously indicated, religious syncretism shares certain qualities with the formation of ethnic identity, having a processual quality, as well as functioning as a reference group in which a membership can be evoked or revoked based on momentary and contextual needs (Barth 1969). In this sense, it is interesting to see that in some Sugpiaq Alutiiq communities religious and ethnic affiliation are so intertwined that separation from one would automatically mean the alienation from the other as well, while in other communities, the two do not necessarily go hand in hand. Those Sugpiaq, who had decided to leave Orthodoxy behind and take on a different religious identity had discarded the previous analogy as meaningless, and created a new one with the religion of their choice, based on various cultural and personal realities that were important and made sense to them at that particular time. Thus these analogies are built on and governed by local epistemological and ontological principles, which first and foremost, make sense to the local people who then decide to utilize or to discard them.

Conceptualizing Russian Orthodoxy through the Sugpiaq understanding of reality made it possible for people in Nanwalek to maintain the Church and their faith by fully integrating it into the community as well as into people's ontological reality to the point that it is no longer alien, but rather an important element of Sugpiaq identity. In this case, the concept of charisma in leadership and social ranking, as it is connected to the perception of authority, created a link, an analogy, between the two different cultural and religious practices. The ranked social system of pre-contact Sugpiaq culture resonated with the highly stratified internal structure of Orthodoxy, and allowed people of high standing in the secular sphere to assume additional authority through the Church, and to capitalize on this connection by extending their system of social networks to include both religious and cultural social spheres. Therefore, the success of Orthodoxy in the single-denominational community of Nanwalek is due to the combination of several factors that are all connected by, and created on the basis of, a conceptual analogy between religion and the traditional local notions of social life.

Through establishing conceptual analogies the Sugpiat of the Lower Kenai Peninsula internalized Russian Orthodoxy during the initial period of contact. Additionally, they passed down these analogies as intrinsically (Sugpiaq) cultural traditions throughout the generations including the people currently living in Nanwalek. Because these analogies are synthesized and integrated into people's perception of reality, it became part of their epistemology. Being Russian Orthodox makes sense to them, while being non-Orthodox does not. They find it fulfilling to be Sugpiaq Russian Orthodox both through their spiritual devotion as well as through their ontological reality. Therefore conceptual analogies allow the Sugpiaq people of Nanwalek to create a cultural system encompassing both the religious and the secular spheres of the community, where Sugpiaq Russian Orthodoxy is one of the most prominent ethnic markers of their conceptualization of Sugpiaq identity.

6.1. Prospects for Conceptual Analogy

I consider the notion of conceptual analogy as an intrinsic part of the process of religious syncretism, and not as an idiosyncratic phenomenon specific to the Sugpiaq Russian Orthodoxy of Nanwalek. I suggest considering it as a tool or a device, which can

be used to further explore religious phenomena and the ways religious thought is embedded in cultural context. As religious landscapes are highly unstable even after the indigenization of foreign religions, the process of synthesis requires the production of a certain framework that allows room for flexibility, thus facilitating the alteration of the ideas according to the needs of the parties involved. Religious syncretism is not a mere copy of a foreign idea or concept; rather it is a conceptualization through local understandings of reality. By absorbing, deconstructing and reframing such alien concepts for local “consumption,” people can not only legitimize the presence of the foreign component in their cultural milieu, but they can also transform and internalize it to the point where it is no longer regarded as foreign, but as their own cultural conceptualizations. Through conceptual analogies religious thought is integrated to local contexts, where they are viewed as a cultural constituent with specific meanings within people’s ontological realities. According to this understanding, conceptual analogy can shed light on question of meaning-making, cultural selection, the interplay between religious and other forms of identity formation, religious adaptation to local contexts, and the conceptualization of religious ideas through cultural cognition.

Previously I addressed the question of multi-denominational religious representations within some of the Sugpiaq Alutiiq villages today. As I have not done substantial ethnographic research in any other Sugpiaq village besides Nanwalek, the following theorization is based on the people’s perception living in Nanwalek, as well as on historical considerations.

During the Russian colonial period, some of the villages, as for example those on Kodiak Island, were exposed to the activities of the Russian colonial administration to a greater degree than other ones, including the lower-Kenai semi-permanent settlements. This also meant greater involvement in the life of the Orthodox Church in Russian America, more regular visits from clergy, as well as greater access to involvement in the Russian colonial project. After the sale of Alaska, the accessibility of these larger population centers was prone to attract the incoming population from the contiguous states and from other parts of the world. Smaller communities remained secluded from this new population for the first decades of the American era, and opened up for outsiders only with the commencement of the fishing industry. Many fish canneries and salteries were established in previously secluded villages, which business enterprises also brought

in a relatively large number of “outsiders” who were mostly non-Native (Naske and Slotnick 1987: 101)¹⁰⁸.

Based on the hierarchical nature of social networks, which are the key organizing factors of social life and interactions, the permanent toleration of “unconnected” people is impossible. In chapters three and four I demonstrated, through a variety of examples, that living in a small community without being part of a larger social network is almost entirely unattainable. The security social networks provide for their members is an important element of everyday survival, which is ensured by the mutual reliance on one another through the shared understandings that govern the internal structure of a network. In a ranked society, where social networks are formulated in regards to notions of power and authority, outsiders need to be incorporated before they can be recognized by the people in the community of networks. Whether this is done through the creation of fictional or actual kinship ties, or by assigning a social position to the newcomers, everybody has to have a place in the system that is defined in relations to others. This, of course, makes the social networks flexible and in constant flux, yet not completely impervious to social problems often associated with cultural contact.

Unlike incorporating a few individuals into a social network system, a large group of people often create their own, exclusive, network in a foreign social arena. I do not suggest the complete lack of interaction between the workers of the new business and the local people; rather I propose that such interactions took place on a different scale and levels. Some outsiders probably did become part of the local social network, while others, most likely, chose to minimize interactions. Regardless, due to their relatively large numbers they brought a new dynamic into the community. The social structure of these businesses did not necessarily coincide with the social structure of the village, which influenced the sudden and overwhelming influx of new ideas and practice. In many cases, workers also brought their own religiosity with them, opening up the possibilities for the conceptualizations of new analogies.

Partnow (1993:173-175) describes the case of “Scandinavian-Aleut families” in the villages of Perryville and Chignik Lake on the Alaska Peninsula, who, due to their multi-cultural characteristics, often turned away from Orthodoxy. Moreover, when the

¹⁰⁸ Which was complemented by the introduction of formal, bureaucratic education and schools later on.

first Slavic Gospel Church mission arrived to Perryville and succeeded in gaining converts, the “schism [between the Orthodox and non-Orthodox community members] was brought to a head in 1965 when six families left the village and moved to Ivanof Bay” (Partnow 1993: 177). Due to the changes in their social circumstances and to the permeation of new cultural ideas, some of the people living in these villages re-evaluated their situations, re-framed their general ideas regarding their own social landscapes, and often re-conceptualized the analogies they have previously perceived with a particular religion. Some chose to turn to a new religion emphasizing cultural ideas that resonated with the newly emerging social context, and others chose to re-enforce their connection to their old, Russian Orthodox, faith. In such cases, the selection people made was based on a momentary evaluation of their situations and needs as well as the assessment of their personal situations. It is not a purely religious choice, but a choice based on a combination of social, cultural, economic and religious considerations. At a particular time, at a particular place, for some people, reorienting their religious connections made sense based on the new analogy they conceptualized between the changes in their social-cultural conditions, and the ideology and practice of the new church(es).

For others, Russian Orthodoxy remained the only religion that provided meaning within their lives, and oftentimes, this latter section of a community was characterized as “traditionalist”. Several ethnographies note the emergence of the connection between Russian Orthodoxy and a traditionalist section of an Alaska Native community, where people systematically promote the continual enactment and preservation of their “ancestral” cultural traditions including those reinterpreted within Russian Orthodoxy (Desson 1995, Davis 1970, Dauenhauer 1997, Dombrowski 2001, Fienup-Riordan 1990, Kan 1983, 1996, Mousalimas 2003, Oleksa 1987, 1993, Oswalt 1963, Partnow 1993, 2001, Znamenski 1996, 1999). In general, this phenomenon is explained by the missionary agenda of Russian Orthodoxy allowing room for the incorporation of the everyday realities of local life and not requiring people to make major lifestyle changes when becoming an Orthodox Christian.

On a larger scale, this connection is an analogy, a set of ideas that are perceived to be similar, which people create between their religiosity and the expiring social changes in their immediate environment. For many Native peoples of Alaska Russian Orthodoxy became a part of their cultural repertoire, through internalization and

indigenization, by finding analogies based on their own cultural logic, and subsequently correspondences, which revealed points of comprehensions. Through this process they came to view Russian Orthodoxy as a part of their identity (religious and cultural), which was not in competition with their Native identities, unlike other religions, where transformation to a foreign lifestyle was a prerequisite for assuming religious membership (Mousalimas 1995: 225). The people making the choice of remaining Orthodox in the face of their rapidly changing social milieu were most likely influenced by the opportunities they perceived in Russian Orthodoxy, which prompted them to create an additional level of understanding by drawing an analogy between their own desire of maintaining their culture and the practice of the Orthodox Church in accepting the distinctiveness of local lifestyles. Hence, these “traditionalists” did not merely accept an interpretation offered up to them, but made a link between their religious and their cultural identities through their own logical conceptualization, based on their cultural logic. It was not simply a mechanical act based on the processes of their minds, rather a contextual process of selecting one religiosity over another under culturally and historically specific circumstances.

I do not claim to know the basis for creating such analogies in every single case, because it differs greatly from situation to situation and as such, it requires a thorough investigation in each particular framework. What I find important to point out is the possibility to recognize these conceptually created analogies in a variety of situations where religious syncretism transpires. Through the politics of synthesizing religious concepts with cultural ones, people try to make sense of the newly emerging phenomena in their world, which prompts them to select those that make sense to them over those which do not. I believe there are intuitive ontologies (Boyer 1994: 154) in the human mind automatically striving to find and order meaning to unknown or foreign concepts by corresponding them to familiar ones, yet this process is not always successful. Sometimes people simply cannot make sense of certain elements invading their reality, which situation people often solve by strategically and systematically disregarding the offending idea, practice, or fact. If it is not possible to create a mental link and internalize a new concept, it is also not possible to find a place for it in everyday applications and mental processes. Because a concept is viewed as “nothing,” after a while it does become

“nothing,” therefore people make selections from a wide array of options available for them including concepts of religiosity.

Naturally, some concepts are easier to ignore than others, especially when they have a tendency of coming back, despite people’s systematic and strategic disregard for them. In such cases people eventually have to make a stance by modifying both the new and their own concepts to create some kind of correlation which is by no means satisfying or internalized to the point of synthesis, but it mitigates the immediate needs for its acknowledgment. The “bureaucratic enough system” I described in chapter four is exactly this type of connection born out of people’s forced reaction to a concept impossible to ignore. In chapter four I also provided a religious example often found in multi-denominational communities, where it becomes impossible to create a completely shared understanding of Native identity, due to the various interpretations and analogies constructed within the various religious traditions. In such cases people try to find cultural constituents that are easily detachable from the religious association and can be consciously re-formulated as carrying exclusively cultural meaning, thus strengthening the shared ideas of group, cultural, and ethnic identities¹⁰⁹.

Perhaps it is safe to conclude that Russian Orthodoxy in Alaska Native communities is still present today, even prevalent in some of the villages, partially due to the religion’s internal organization resting on “traditional authority” in the Weberian sense. When members of the Orthodox Church make donations or volunteer their labor it is not done on an impersonal basis. Rather, these offerings are made based on their loyalty and their personal connection with God, which are expressed through these actions. Native people living in the villages of Alaska have been maintaining their churches and their Orthodox faith without much outside help in the past hundred years. The members of the Church are responsible to provide for the priests, for the church buildings, and for the devotional items. They are also responsible to participate in the numerous services according the teachings of the Church, and to preserve the Orthodox faith on a personal level, in their families and in their communities. This is not a rationalized connection based on impersonal obligations. The everyday life of an

¹⁰⁹ This practice raises the questions of contestation between the various kinds of identities and reference groups people develop, especially their relative hierarchies to one another, and the way people perceive and organize them in relation to their momentary situations.

Orthodox Church in a Native community is not governed by bureaucracy. As I demonstrated in the previous chapters, monetary contributions are not collected on a regular basis, because most people do not necessarily have a regular income. Work to be done in the Church is scheduled whenever a need arises, and not on periodical prearrangements, because that is the way people take care of their own projects as well. People constantly make contributions based on their personal circumstances with the understanding that their membership in the Church is not dependent on the scale of their participation. Just because somebody cannot contribute, it does not mean that the sacraments or blessings would be withheld from that person. Likewise, people do not “stop” being Orthodox just because they do not attend services on a regular basis; in their own understanding they are still Orthodox and have no interest in any other religion. Being unhappy with particularities in Church or with some of the clergy does not cause people to abandon their faith and convert to a new religion (Pascal 1976: 21), if being Orthodox, in general, still makes sense to them. The connection between Alaska Natives and Russian Orthodoxy is not an obligatory bond, but a conceptual one, which allows people to capitalize on the perceived similarities between the structural organization of their Church and that of their community.

When I first became interested in Russian Orthodoxy in Alaska, I met the late Bishop Innocent in Valdez when he came to perform a wedding. As I described my research interest to him during the reception, he nodded and said: “yes, we have Native people here, they are the ones who are Orthodox, and they are our people in the Orthodox Church” (Personal Communication with Bishop Innocent 2000). Yet Russian Orthodoxy in Alaska is not restricted to small communities, as people carry their faith with them wherever they go. Sometimes people from villages decide to move to a larger, predominantly non-Native, settlement for a while, whether it is their regional hub or Anchorage. Naturally, there are Russian Orthodox Churches in towns and cities as well, yet they are shared by members coming from a large variety of cultural background.

Therefore it is interesting to theorize on questions relating to the maintenance of mentally created analogies between a specific cultural milieu and that of Orthodoxy in situations where people may need to transfer their loyalties to an Orthodox Church they do not (necessarily) consider their “own”.

In chapter three I described certain “signs of being Sugpiaq” people recognize within and outside of their communities. These indicators are always connected to some aspects of local understandings manifesting through proper or improper behaviors, and acknowledged “on the outside” just as much as within the village. When people leave their villages they do not cease to be part of their communities, rather they tend to seek out others whom they perceive to be similar to them in some sense. Through my husband’s experiences I described the way people group together when traveling outside of their community, and they also meet up with friends and relatives, people they consider to be within their social networks, when they live in a town or a city.

Being away from their village can bring community members together into a new social network, because they are a source of comfort and security for one another. They are still connected to their friends and relatives in their village by sharing information, resources, and a cultural logic (Lee 2002). People do not stop thinking about themselves as a Native person from a particular cultural group, but they might decide to emphasize certain aspects of their identity over others, in order to create links to the local social networks. In larger population centers, such as regional hubs, where the majority of people are non-Native, and the minority Native population is segmented by cultural differences, it is important to find a common ground, a place where people feel they can fit in. Consequently, in most of the cases Native people moving from their villages to cities form social networks which are over-imposed on the city’s own socio-cultural organization. In this sense they create their own diaspora, similarly to other ethnic groups in urban areas.

For the most part, urban social networks are not created completely apart from their rural counterparts; rather they can be regarded as their extensions. For example, when I worked with Russian Orthodox people in Valdez, most of them were originally from the Native (Sugpiaq) villages of the Prince William Sound region, or the larger Sugpiaq Alutiiq cultural area. The dynamics of the social network were largely influenced by these associations, as the various personal connections and loyalties to these villages needed to be re-organized and re-structured based on the reality of sharing a life in Valdez. Simultaneously, the shared social network of Valdez also affected the life of these villages through the authority people acquired in the new social milieu,

which required the re-evaluation of people's social status upon their returns to their communities.

People seek out and participate in urban social networks based on their culturally constructed ideas regarding social life, including religious membership. When they leave their communities, they all carry culturally specific ideas regarding Orthodoxy and the connections between their religious and ethnic identities. Therefore they do not cease to be influenced by the mental analogies created through their communities' cultural logic in the new environment; yet, it also does not prevent them from conceptualizing new connections. One of the most obvious links people living in a diaspora often create with local churches of a particular religion is based on the perception of "home" (Ware 1997: 174). In general, members of a diaspora do not randomly select a church community to join. Instead, they attend a church either because it is the only church in their proximity of their own religious tradition, or because they "follow" other members of their new social network along to services. Over time, they tend to select one particular church over any others that resembles most to their ideas regarding what a church is supposed to be like, which conceptualization is shaped by their experiences in their "home" communities. Using conceptual analogies can delineate this general understanding of familiarity even further. By looking for mentally created analogies it is possible to explore what makes members of a diaspora connect to, and feel at home in, certain churches and religious communities over others, thus highlighting the processes of internalization and cultural selection.

Uncovering such connections becomes especially interesting in situations where a religious community incorporates multiple social networks and people coming from a variety of diasporas, which is the case for Orthodox Alaska Natives living in Anchorage. There are over a dozen different Orthodox Churches in the city; therefore it is inevitable for Native people to encounter non-Native Orthodox Christians, whether they are members of a culturally different diaspora, or converts to Orthodoxy. It is equally inevitable to accept the association with some of these groups, while rejecting others. These choices are governed by people's perception based on their own connections to their religions, and of course, if they find factors important to them missing or lacking in a religious community they are likely to move on (Kirsch 2004: 705). For example, for most Native people it is important to find an Orthodox Church where they can contribute

in a manner that is similar to the way they care for their “own” churches. If their donations or labor are not appreciated and accepted due to the different understandings of these concepts in an urban church, they find it difficult to create a link, with that particular Orthodox community. For this reason they seek out other churches where they can practice their faith in a manner that makes sense to them, and which allows them to be Orthodox Christians without contesting their world views and reference group affiliations.

It sounds simple enough, yet in reality, we do not know much about the micro-processes of religious syncretism. What are the exact factors that prompt people to turn away from a religious group and what drives them to reach a breaking point? Are there any cultural ideas that take precedence over others when it comes to creating religious connections? Why does a group of people select association with one particular religiosity, and why do they reject other ones? How do people create such an intimate link with a previously foreign religious concept that they start to see it as their very own? How do people make a selection from the multitude of concepts while envisioning such connections? How is the relationship between popular religiosity and world religions negotiated? What are the general connections between cultural and religious conceptualizations and how do people coordinate them in meaning-making? To what extent does people’s conceptualization of their religious identity influence their ethnic and group identities? Can previously analogized cultural concepts be removed from their particular religious association and reinterpreted? And finally, if syncretism is an inherent part of all religions why is it successful with a long-lasting religious legacy in certain cultural contexts, and why does it fail to make impressions on others?

As I demonstrated throughout this dissertation, the idea of conceptual analogy addresses all these interrelating questions in exploring religious phenomena, and their connections to cultural constituents. Consequently, the notion of conceptual analogy is not restricted to one particular religious and cultural tradition in general, but the analogies themselves are always culture-specific. Therefore conceptual analogies can be found in all situations where an ongoing conversation develops through syncretism, an inherent aspect of religion, as cultural internalization and re-conceptualization. The nature, and the basis for such analogies are always different, yet the process by which they allow people to “make sense” of foreign religious concepts is the same.

In some cases conceptual analogies can influence group identity formation to the point where religious and cultural identities become inseparable and mutually support one another over time. Stewart (1994: 140), in his study of Greek national discourse, highlights the ongoing connections between ancient Greek religion and current Greek Orthodoxy, which supported the modern Greek claim of cultural continuity with Ancient Greece, necessary to establish authenticity, the precondition of obtaining foreign support for the Greek war of independence. In a contrasting situation, Hefner describes the case of Christian youths in Java choosing to transfer their religious association to Christianity from Hinduism, based on their inability to separate their cultural understandings from their religious ones (Hefner 1993b: 116). In their view the Hinduism of the village leaders, who were responsible for the deaths of their relatives during the anti-communist surge of 1965, and the leaders' authority embedded in the traditional social order became inseparable. For this reason, they perceived Christianity as a venue for separation from the cultural context and chose to establish a new identity through a new conceptual analogy. To know the exact basis for the analogy in this case is impossible without an extensive study. Yet, the fact that they were unable to reconcile their religious affiliation as Hindu with their personal choice of disassociation from the social hierarchy of their community points to the direction of a conceptual analogy that was no longer facilitating religious integration into their social-cultural reality. The social aspect of Christianity, not having a rigid association with the traditional Javanese social hierarchy, provided these young people with the opportunity to conceptualize their newly constructed social self within a new religious milieu.

Exposure to new religious ideas and realities does not automatically result in long-lasting influences. On the contrary, in many cases people decline missionizing attempts precisely because the prospects of the new religion has nothing consequential to offer. If people cannot conceptualize a foreign religious tradition through their own ontological realities, they are unable to create analogies for the process of internalization. The Culina of Amazonia rejected Catholicism because the Jesuit missionaries were part of the colonial system and as such, they were associated with epidemics, enslavement, and forced labor (Pollock 1993: 191). In this case, there was simply no basis for analogy, because Catholicism engendered only negative experiences, which previously were not present in Culina reality. In other cases, such as the history of Tswana Christianity, the

breaking point for a conscious seclusion from a particular religious tradition follows after a period of cultural negotiation. At first, the new Christian ideas were mediated through Tswana thought and the Tswana framework of making sense of life. Later on, however, the missionary notion of conversion extended to the total transformation of the Tswana, including religious and lifestyle alteration to the point when all converts become just like white people (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991: 244). The Tswana, on the other hand, as a response to such strong exhibition of cultural markers and demand for desertion of the old ways, reacted exactly opposite to the missionary expectations, and learned to conceptualize Tswana as a collection of constituents of everyday life that distinctly describe them as Tswana, which did not include correlations to Christianity.

Ultimately, the process of creating conceptual analogies involves human agency, as the internalization of a particular religious tradition is a choice of those within a specific cultural group. When it is impossible to select only particular cultural constituents for creating a mental connection to a new form of religion the analogy can be created based on the conceptualization of religion itself as it is understood by people. The Akha of Burma understood the concept of *zah* not as their religion in isolation, rather as a unity of practices, things they do as part of their lives. Therefore, when confronted with Western influences, they exchanged their old *zah* to a new Christian one, which was more apt in conferring the challenges of their changing sociocultural landscape (Bowen 2002: 167). This transfer of meaning was created on the basis of local understanding and not an outside interpretation, which is a significant part of lasting internalization. When the local creation and ordering of meaning is contrasted with external interpretations, the underlying questions of authority present in the politics of religious synthesis become pronounced. As a result, conceptual analogies are often influenced by local perceptions of power-relations, which cannot be resolved through foreign imposition, only by local conceptualization. In Southern Indian Catholicism, Jesuit missionaries did not merely allow, but purposefully employed, the display of caste inequalities during the early days of the mission. They correctly identified the importance of analogies in creating religious affiliation; therefore they consciously targeted members of the higher castes in their Christianizing efforts (Mosse 1994). When locals, through their own interpretations, started to use Catholicism in reference to caste differences during Hindu religious processions, the Church withdrew its support and prohibited the further display of caste

inequalities. The subsequent decline in the popularity of Catholicism amongst South Indians is a good indication of the problems arising from competing external and internal meaning-making. For the successful adaptation of a religious tradition to local cultural context, people need to conceptualize the relevant analogies on their own terms, so that the analogies make sense to them in their locally lived experience. Otherwise internalization is not possible, similarly to the viability of the newly introduced religious practices and concepts, which remain exactly that: foreign.

By accepting, actively seeking, or vigorously refusing association with a foreign religious tradition people consciously make choices regarding their everyday lives, which allow them to take on different identities in relation to the various agencies concurrently occupying their changing religious spheres. Thereby they efficiently internalize religious concepts according to their own cultural logic, while maintaining the possibilities of potential negotiations in the future.

In this dissertation I suggested new theoretical approaches to consider within the study of religious syncretism. I also used the newly formulated idea of conceptual analogy to describe the process of meaning-making people apply between the religious and the social-cultural aspects of their ontological realities. Furthermore, I argued that conceptual analogy is always present in the process of religious syncretism, as it is the underlying concept in the hermeneutics of religious internalization.

I suggest that using the tool of conceptual analogy to understand religious phenomena provides opportunities for considering religious syncretism as an active and recurrent aspect of religiosity, which does not occur in isolation; rather, it is in constant interaction with other significant elements of peoples' lives. In the constantly changing socio-cultural milieu, syncretism allows people to reframe their religious traditions to cope with cultural change, and conceptual analogies provide insight into how the synthesizing process operates in a cultural context while interacting with other cultural constituents. Lastly, in the study of religion, the notion of conceptual analogy can be employed to explore the way culture specific epistemological understandings influence the human conceptualization of religious phenomena.

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